DE VALCOURT;

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Printed by T. PLUMMER,
Seething-lane, Tower-ſtreet.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DE VALCOURT;

IN TWO VOLUMES.

Along yon glittering ſky what glory ſtreams!
What majeſty attends night's lovely queen!
Fair laugh our vallies in the vernal beams,
And mountains riſe, and oceans roll between,
And all conſpire to beautify the ſcene.
But in the mental world, what chaos drear,
What forms of mournful, loathſome, furious mein!
O when ſhall that eternal morn appear,
Thoſe dreadful forms to chaſe, the chaos dark to clear?

BEATTY.

VOL. II.

London:
PRINTED FOR R. DUTTON, BIRCHIN-LANE,
CORHILL.

1800.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DE VALCOURT.

CHAP. I.

Bring me my tablets—
'Tis right I ſhould ſet down, that men may ſmile and ſmile,
And yet be villains.

SHAKSPEARE.

"YOU are acquainted with the ſingular introduction of De Valcourt to my family—you know too ſome of the varied events of his life—and are not ignorant of his preſent friendleſs ſituation;—you will not wonder then, if impreſſed with thoſe circumſtances, and humbled by that impreſſion, he ſhould

have thought of leaving me ignorant of his affection, had not a chain of circumſtances forced the confeſſion from him—when my heart, agitated by the hopes and fears ſuſpence had created, was rendered incapable of diſguiſe, had I thought diſguiſe neceſſary; but my principles diſdaining concealment, even in love, I frankly avowed all the feelings of my heart—all its feelings did I ſay! no, they would have been cold indeed, could I have expreſſed them. De Valcourt, who as well as myſelf, is an enemy to ſecrecy, immediately acquainted Lady Mountſhannon with a conduct which to him appeared, ſituated as he then was, not quite conſiſtant with honour; when that amiable friend, that more than parent, ſanctioned and approved our loves, but to prevent a father's cenſure, inſiſted on my De Valcourt's uſing every effort to regain his eſtate; you know the ſuſpence in which I have been kept—you have witneſſed the agony, the deſpair which agitated me while ignorant of his fate—and have, I thought, ſometimes regarded

garded me with an eye of pity;—but that aroſe from the conſciouſneſs that you were the cauſe—from a momentary compunction for your own baſeneſs;—you had ſeen my De Valcourt, had been admitted to his confidence—and it is you who have meanly betrayed us to my father—and to you too I owe the diſappointment of this night.—Ah! Sir Charles, what have I done that I ſhould thus be marked out as the object of your injuſtice, deceit, and treachery—what injury to provoke from you this cruel treatment!"—cried ſhe, while the tears ſhe had till now with difficulty ſuppreſſed, flowed down her cheeks.

Sir Charles was affected—the contending emotions of his mind agitated his features, and choaked his utterance; he paced the room with haſty ſtrides, vehemently ſtriking his forehead, and exhibiting every proof of a mind ſtruggling under the pangs of conſcious error, yet too proud to acknowledge a fault, while trembling to loſe the ſtake for

which he had forfeited his rectitude; at length becoming more calm, gazing earneſtly in Matilda's face, ſtill impreſſed with ſorrow, he cried, "Can you forgive the man who has injured you, and conſent to become the friend of him, who, a convert to your virtues, entreats you to guide him through life—to be his monitreſs."

Though unable to ſpeak, ſhe held out her hand in token of forgiveneſs, and as he preſſed it to his lips, "Ah! Matilda," ſaid he, "let the fullneſs of my preſent confeſſion, convince you of my ſincerity.—It is not without a ſevere ſtruggle I have brought myſelf to acknowledge my crimes; believe me, the man who can confeſs himſelf guilty of injuring another without reluctance, feels little compunction; but my heart is wrung with remorſe ſo great, that could you, who have moſt cauſe to hate me, witneſs its feelings, you would, I am ſure, pity me."—As he uttered this, his voice was ſoftened, a tear

tear fell on her hand, when the door was ſuddenly opened, and De Valcourt entered.

Matilda firſt looked round—ſurpriſe and joy were viſible in her countenance; unconſcious of error, the ſuſpicious circumſtances under which ſhe was placed, did not once occur to her mind, till his diſdainful frown, as ſhe approached the ſpot where he ſtood in ſilent aſtoniſhment, recalled her recollection: ſhe would then have explained her ſituation, but interrupting her with a ſeverity in his looks and manner that made her tremble, "It is not to me, Matilda," ſaid he," you ſhould apologize—I can no longer be of conſequence—I regard you with pity, and I am perſuaded your own heart will at ſome future period, reproach you for this conduct—you will then need all the blandiſhments of ſophiſtry to reconcile you to yourſelf.—O! how in one ſhort month is that mind degraded which I once thought the ſeat of perfection—where I fondly fancied every virtue dwelt—ſurely your pro-

greſs in the arts of diſſimulation has been rapid, for who that had heard your vows of love to me this night, could have ſuppoſed you had made a midnight aſſignation with another; for I reſpected your delicacy too much to have aſked ſuch an indulgence, though my circumſtances might have warranted it; watched as I have been, I have ſtill hovered near your chamber window, and came here hoping to find the door unfaſtened, that I might take from hence the little pipe with which I had been wont to awaken you, and with which I intended once more to break your ſlumbers, that we might again viſit the alter I had raiſed to gratitude and love; where I might again hear you repeat your affection for the forlorn De Valcourt; where I might without interruption, reconcile to our ſeparation your mind, which I fondly flattered myſelf was pained at my departure, and obtain fortitude from your example, once more to ſay farewell! But thoſe dreams of viſionary bliſs are fled for ever. For you, Sir Charles, I leave you

to triumph in your machinations—to enjoy happineſs, if after violating the laws of friendſhip, after forfeiting every claim to ſincerity, you are capable of it. I ſhall not call you to account; the falſe laws of honor have loſt their influence over my mind; I am cured of dueling." So ſaying, he quitted the apartment, and darting acroſs the path, leaped the garden wall, and diſappeared in a moment.

Matilda ſhrieked, but neither her cries nor the efforts of the Baronet, who followed entreating him to return, could move De Valcourt.

Sir Charles would then have comforted Matilda, but her mind, a perfect chaos, was not to be ſoothed, though not wholly without reſentment againſt De Valcourt, for his haſty judgment; yet pity and alarm were her predominant feelings. Finding he could not quiet her fears, he offered to go immediately in ſearch of him; to this ſhe at firſt

objected, fearing it might be productive of diſagreeable conſequences, till he aſſured her that no reproaches ſhould have power to make him angry, as he was convinced the injury he had already done them, required ſome reparation, and he ſhould find the exerciſe of his patience, in the preſent inſtance, ſoothing to his mind; ſhe at length conſented, and once more returned to her chamber to wait the event of this meeting, while the Baronet haſtened to the village.

Matilda, as ſhe paſſed through the gallery, was met by her father, who ſuddenly ſtopped, as if inclined to enter into converſation; but darting on her a look of enquiry, he walked ſilently on, and ſpared her the confuſion of immediately accounting for her appearance. Lord Mountſhannon, though ſurpriſed to ſee her ſtill in the dreſs of the preceding evening, and unable to account for her wandering thus early about the caſtle, had no inclination to make enquiries at preſent, as his own mind was not in the moſt quiet ſtate. Diſconcerted by the Viſcounts peremptory

tory demands the preceding night, and unable to form any plan to extricate himself from his embarraſſment, ſleep had forſaken his pillow, and he was vainly endeavouring to baniſh his uneaſy ſenſations. Though his eſtate had been wholly unincumbered by family expences, yet a long reſidence in the metropolis, where he entered into all the diſſipation of a voluptuous court, had involved the Earl in many pecuniary difficulties: he had long ſince deeply mortgaged a large part of his landed property—had diſtreſſed his tenantry with various exactions—and had had recourſe to every meaſure of raiſing money. The gaming table, at laſt, offered as a reſource in every exigency, which as he was at firſt ſucceſsful, operating on his natural avarice, by intereſting his paſſions, became the favorite purſuit of his life. For the laſt two years he had purſued this deſtructive vice, experiencing alternate ſucceſs and diſappointment, with all the ardor his mind was capable of, till fortune wholly forſaking him, and a continual run of ill luck ſouring his temper, and obliging him to look round

for freſh means of ſupply, he had written that letter to his wife which had given ſo much pain; but recollecting how much larger a ſum he ſhould obtain if he could gain poſſeſſion of his children's fortune, he altered his plan, and affected the change of ſentiments already deſcribed.

Having loſt conſiderable ſums, both to the Viſcount and Lord Ormond, which he was unable to pay, he had, as a compenſation for the debt, promiſed his daughter in marriage to the one, and to unite her to the ſon of the other, on the ſame terms; and for that purpoſe were they induced to viſit Mountford Caſtle.

Truſting to the dexterity of his management, he remained ſome time ſecure, hoping Matilda, unacquainted as ſhe was with the world, would ſoon be brought to feel a preference for the Viſcount, who ſtood high on the annals of gallantry, and was conſidered as one of the meteors of the Court; and that his

his, rhetoric operating on her inexperience, might induce her to a private union; in which ſcheme he had almoſt perſuaded him to join, alledging the haughty temper of Lady Mountſhannon, who, allowed the ſole diſpoſal of her children by the doating folly of their grandfather, would never conſent to any marriage propoſed by himſelf, however deſirable it might be.

By this ſcheme he expected not only to ſatisfy both the Viſcount and Lord Ormond, (as he reſolved to throw all the odium on the former, and not appear openly an actor in the plot) but to induce his Lady to commit to him the management of his ſon's fortune during his minority. Of Matilda's forgiveneſs from her mother, he had no doubt, (for he well knew the virtue of his wife) and with this certainty he had endeavoured to impreſs the Viſcount, who not quite ſo ſecure as himſelf, and wiſhing to diſcover her Ladyſhip's ſentiments on the ſubject, had, from the firſt, been rather more open in his ad-

dreſſes to Matilda, than ſuited his lordſhip's plans, who had often found it very difficult to appeaſe the jealouſy of Lord Ormond.

But the coldneſs of Matilda wholly diſconcerted a ſcheme which the wary Viſcount had never cordially embraced, and who, provoked by the frequent intruſions of Sir Charles, both before and during the maſquerade, had, when heated by wine, called on his lordſhip publicly to acknowledge his claim to Matilda, and thereby free her from the impertinent aſſiduities of the Baronet, and ſecure to himſelf a more favourable reception—for to timidity alone he aſcribed her coldneſs, and had no doubt of her warmeſt affections, when ſanctioned by parental authority—neither had he much fear of bringing Lady Mountſhannon to approve his ſuit, for vanity was the predominant feature in his character; nor could all his lordſhip urged on that ſubject, divert him from his purpoſe. But irritated by his evaſive

evaſive anſwers—influenced by his ſuſpicions, he threatened him with immediate expoſure; and all the Earl's artful flatteries could obtain from him no more than a few days reſpite: thus were his plans in a moment overturned, and himſelf reduced to the moſt aukward ſituation.

It was to this converſation Lady Mountſhannon had reluctantly liſtened, drawn to the ſpot by ſome angry words, without knowing from whom they proceeded, when the ſight of the perſons engaged in diſpute alarmed her fears; while the ſubject of their diſcourſe fixed her attention; and though ſhe deteſted the meanneſs of liſtening, yet the publicity of the place—the deep intereſt ſhe felt in their converſation pleading in excuſe, ſhe remained fixed to the ſpot, till ſhe heard the faint hopes ſhe yet entertained of her children finding a protector in their father blaſted.

Matilda,

Matilda, when retired to her chamber, endeavoured to calm the agitation of her mind, Though angry with De Valcourt for his haſte to condemn, yet her judgment confeſſed the circumſtances in which he found her were very ſuſpicious, and ſhe trembled, leſt urged by his impetuoſity, he ſhould quit the kingdom before ſhe ſhould have an opportunity to explain to him thoſe circumſtances; ſhe wiſhed to go inſtantly in ſearch of him, though ſhe knew not, alas! whither; but ſmarting under paſt accidents, and fearing, ſhould ſhe meet Sir Charles in her rout, and be again ſeen with him, De Valcourt's jealouſly might be increaſed, ſhe determined to remain patient till his return. In this frame of mind ſhe threw herſelf on the bed, where, exhauſted by fatigue, ſhe ſoon fell aſleep, ſpite of the anxiety that corroded her boſom.

The clock ſtruck eight, when Sir Charles, gently tapping at her door, broke her ſlumbers. He had met De Valcourt, who, repenting his vehemence, was returning to the caſtle,

caſtle, to gain, if poſſible, another interview, hoping to find ſome alleviation of his fears; but determined at leaſt to be more fully convinced of her infidelity before his departure, as he found he could not quit her for ever, and forego all hopes of happineſs, while the ſmalleſt doubt remained. Though he had entered with reluctance into converſation with the Baronet, and with difficulty reſtrained his temper, while he confeſſed the deceptions he had practiſed on him; yet when he found himſelf ſtill the only object of Matilda's affection—of her anxious ſolicitude, he readily forgave him the many uneaſy hours he had made him ſuffer, and the meeting ended with mutual profeſſions of friendſhip, more ſincere on the part of Sir Charles, than any of his former had been.

Haſtily ſlipping on a looſe gown, ſhe entered the gallery, when the Baronet, who ſtill lingered there, forgeting at her approach, all his virtuous reſolutions—all the ties by which he had bound himſelf, and unable,

able, whilſt gazing on her, to endure the thought of yielding her to another—of relinquiſhing for ever his claim to her affection, ſunk on his knees, and was about to violate his own ideas of honour, by again pleading his paſſion. But a look from Matilda recalled his recollection—he remembered with what energy ſhe had pronounced her heart devoted to another, in bonds that neither time nor circumſtances could looſen; and preſſing her hand to his lips, he cried, "I will be your friend; and if it muſt be ſo, only your friend;" then riſing, he precipitately retired, afraid to truſt himſelf longer in her ſociety.

Sir Charles, though accuſtomed from infancy to every indulgence, to have even his wiſhes prevented, was yet too proud, and too generous to receive the unwilling hand from parental tyranny, when the heart had no ſhare in the compact. He had hitherto yielded to every ſally of paſſion, without once reflecting on its conſequences to himſelf or others; yet

he

he was benevolent—his heart glowed with the love of virtue. It was his underſtanding, warped by prejudice, that miſled him; too much pleaſed with power, and the ſuperiority his elevated ſtation gave him, he neglected thoſe higher enjoyments of which his nature was capable; and though he would not have united himſelf, even to Matilda, without having ſecured an intereſt in her affections; he was not very delicate in the means he uſed for that purpoſe.

Fearful of again meeting with interruption, ſhe crept ſoftly along, but univerſal ſilence prevailed; the company tired with the exertions of the paſt night, were ſtill buried in ſleep. Even Lady Mountſhannon, whoſe chamber ſhe entered, remained under its oblivious influence. Unwilling to diſturb her, yet conſcious ſhe would be pained if De Valcourt quitted the country without ſeeing her, ſhe wrote on her tablet, which lay on her table—"I am going to the library to take leave of our friend, who will, in a few hours

hours ſet out for Dover, in his way to France;" then ſoftly cloſing the door, ſhe haſtily deſcended.

De Valcourt, who met her at the library door, would have folded her to his boſom, had not the ſeverity of her looks reſtrained him; ſome little reſentment ſtill lingering in her mind, clouded her countenance; yet, it was reſentment mingled with pity, for what ſhe deemed the greateſt infirmity of his temper, and a wiſh to ſubdue what appeared to her fond imagination the only error of his mind. But this was not a moment either to retain her anger, or effect her wiſhes; her heart was ſoftened the moment he ſpoke, and ſhe could only think of the dreaded interval of ſeparation, and weep over the alteration a month's abſence, waſted in anxiety, had made in his appearance. The time paſſed in interchanges of mutual vows of eternal love; a thouſand times had they falteringly ſaid, "Farewell!" and as often forgetful of every thing but the pleaſure each felt

felt in the other's ſociety, had they found ſome new endearment, or intereſting circumſtance to protract the interview, till Lady Mountſhannon came to join the party, and tell Matilda the caſtle was again in a buſtle, and the company aſſembling; then, after expreſſing her wiſhes for their happineſs, and aſſuring De Valcourt of her reſolution to unite them, under whatever circumſtances he ſhould return, retired; when taking a haſty leave they parted; and Matilda, unable to bear company that day, made a pain, ſhe actually felt in her head, a plea to keep her chamber.

CHAP. IX.

To triumph o'er ourſelves is the only conqueſt where fortune makes no claim.—In battle chance may ſnatch the laurel from thee—or chance may place it on thy brow;—but in a conteſt with yourſelf be reſolute, and the virtuous impulſe muſt be victorious.

SHERIDAN's Pizarro.

MATILDA roſe early the following morning, and hoping to meet the Baronet before the reſt of the company were ſtirring, deſcended to the oak parlour, which commanding a view of the valley, was his favourite apartment, where her mother, whom ſhe had informed of the maſquerade night adventures, ſoon joined her; and before they had waited long, Sir Charles entered, and with ſome heſitation, began his apology:

"I ſhall not attempt to extenuate my conduct, nor waſte my time in fruitleſs regret,"

gret," ſaid he, with a firm voice, " but, relying on the clearneſs of your underſtandings, to diſcern between the whinings of hypocricy and the convictions of reaſon—between well-concerted fiction and the dictates of truth, expect full credit to my aſſertions; and while, from the goodneſs of your hearts, I am ſure of forgivneſs for the paſt, be aſſured it is my firſt wiſh, by my future actions, to inſure your eſteem. On the ſacrifice I am about to make, I ſhall be for ever ſilent, it is due to juſtice; yet, believe me, it requires all my fortitude to relinquiſh my long cheriſhed hopes.

" The eſtate of the late Marquis De Valcourt was beſtowed on me by the King, who never expected it would be claimed, while yet an infant, for ſome ſervice of gallantry rendered him by my father, who, provident, even beyond my wiſhes, improved it to its utmoſt, during my minority. Soon after my coming of age, I felt a wiſh to viſit an eſtate, in which, I own, my pride exulted; and this,

added

added to another inducement not leſs ſtrong, determined me to journey northward, when I had the honour of being firſt introduced to you.

" I had long been acquainted with Lord Mountſhannon; and though you are not much known in the buſy idle world of diſſipation, yet you were ſometimes the ſubjects of converſation. My father, madam," bowing to her ladyſhip, " remembered you when a young-bride, in London, and ſpoke of your perſonal graces with rapture. You were allowed, too, in the moſt cenſorious circles to be virtuous; though they condemned your pride, and reproached you for the ſingular education you had given your children.

" Pleaſed as I was with the gaiety of his lordſhip—much as I was enlivened by his ſociety, (for though his underſtanding is weak, you muſt allow the occaſional ſallies of his wit, and refinement of his manners, rendered him an enſnaring companion to youth)

youth) yet I could not help feeling for him an angry kind of contempt; though pardon me, it was not wholly unmixed with blame towards yourſelf. A father neglecting his offspring, equally regardleſs of their perſonal and moral welfare, ſeemed to me a ſchiſm in nature I could no ways account for; but my curioſity was awakened—I felt an irreſiſtable wiſh to be acquainted with you, and by an intimate knowledge of both characters, develope, if poſſible, what appeared to me a myſtery ſo inexplicable.

" Curioſity, you know, is a feeling that preſſes earneſtly for gratification; yet, I could not bear to owe to his lordſhip my introduction, had I been able to form any excuſe that might have authoriſed my requeſting it. Beſides, I judged I ſhould then be treated with a reſerve that would diſappoint my intentions; I therefore preferred the expedient of loſing my way, and thus throwing myſelf on your hoſpitality; full of this idea, I quittted London.

" Delighted

" Delighted with the cordial, unſuſpecting reception you gave me, I paſſed the firſt night of my arrival here exulting in my ſucceſs, and planning ſchemes to protract my ſtay. But in the morning, when I firſt ſaw you, Matilda, in all the lovelineſs of native ſimplicity—when I liſtened to the dignified ſentiments which flowed from your lips—and admired, while I wondered at the knowledge that informed your mind, my heart, prepared as it already was for every impreſſion, imbibed the fatal poiſon; and though you repreſſed my forward vanity with a ſeverity that mortified my pride, yet I admired, eſteemed, and loved. You ſurpaſſed every idea my imagination had formed of female perfection; I found it impoſſible to go; yet I was awed, and wanted courage to practiſe thoſe fine ſchemes my fertile brain had formed, till your ladyſhip kindly relieved my embarraſſment by inviting my ſtay.

" The introduction of the Marquis De Valcourt, aided by the little hiſtory you had pre-

previouſly given of the nameleſs ſtranger, filled me with confuſion; I ſhrunk from his preſence as a robber, though I had not the virtue to acquaint him with my ſituation and feelings. But when I ſaw his love for you, Matilda, and beheld the affection that ſparkled in your eyes towards him, he became the object of my jealous envy, and every other feeling was loſt in the deſire of revenge. Burning with this paſſion, I rejoiced in the pangs I inflicted the night of your ruſtic ball, though my own heart was torn with the conſciouſneſs, that ſo far from inſpiring affection in that breaſt where my happineſs centered, I had created diſguſt, perhaps had fixed eternal hatred.

"As I had no plea for remaining long at the caſtle, and could not endure the thought of quitting you, without ſome knowledge of my rival's intentions; I was warm in profeſſions of friendſhip to De Valcourt, which he received with that frank cordiality that conſtitutes his character; when, after hint-

ing at ſome matrimonial engagements I was come into this part of the country to fulfil, I taxed him with his love for you. He heſitated, bluſhed, and raved, but at length confeſſed his paſſion. You are right, ſaid I, Marquis, affecting to treat his love as the neceſſary effect of prudence; and it will not, perhaps, be difficult to perſuade a girl who has never ſeen any thing beyond this old caſtle, or converſed with any human beings but the ruſtics of the village, to elope with you; and her fortune will relieve your embarraſſments, and retrieve your credit. At this he fired; I then ſoothed him; we converſed a conſiderable time, and in the end, he acknowledged the danger of his remaining long with you, determined as he was to conceal his affection till you could meet on equal terms, at leaſt, as far as pecuniary concerns made equality. Promiſing to join me within a few weeks in London, we parted, and though I could not much depend on aſſurances drawn from him while his romantic ſentiments were raiſed to the higheſt pitch,

pitch, yet I felt ſomewhat more ſecure; and that the want of ready caſh might not detain him, I ſent a ſum more than ſufficient for his expences in town, by an unknown hand.

" But I could not purſue my intended journey. The eſtate now ſeemed the right of another, of one too, whoſe neceſſities were urgent — and reſolving to avoid the painful ſenſations the ſight of it would give me, I returned to the metropolis, propoſing and rejecting in my mind, a thouſand ſchemes to promote my love. For ſome weeks I endured a ſtate of ſuſpence the moſt painful, unable to reſolve on any plan to introduce myſelf again to your ſociety, and equally unable to forget you. I curſed my too happy rival. In vain I flew to public amuſements; your image haunted me there; I ſought in every face for ſome reſemblance of your's; and though I ſometimes found a feature, a complexion, that recalled you more forcibly to my recollection, yet there wanted the animation which ſparkled in your eye, and in-

formed every feature; I always returned ſilent and melancholy to my home.

" While in this frame of mind, I received a melancholy letter from De Valcourt, in which, after declining my former offers of ſervice, and aſſuring me, he ſhould forſake a world, that had to him produced only one varied ſcene of evil, and retiring to ſome ſequeſtered ſpot, he knew not where, learn to forget the pleaſures and pains of life, and no longer contend with his fate; he exultingly informed me, he had ſubdued his feelings, and, that on the morrow he ſhould quit Mountford caſtle and its inhabitants for ever; ſhould leave Matilda ignorant of his love, unconſcious that ſhe alone ruled in his heart with deſpotic ſway.

" This letter reſtored my peace; when he was removed I had little to fear from other pretenders, and I reſolved to wait till time had a little ſoftened the anguiſh of a firſt diſappointment; when I would make a merit

merit of my forbearance, and had little doubt of inſpiring, by my tender aſſiduities, a paſſion, even more ardent than you had felt for him; I was ſome years younger, and in perſonal attractions, my vanity whiſpered, his ſuperior.

"Thus ſecure, De Valcourt found me, when with newly awaked hopes and changed proſpects, he arrived in London, perfectly cured of his former jealouſy; with all the ardour of a heart glowing with friendſhip, he flew to inform me of his happineſs; unconſcious that every word he ſpoke was a dagger to my heart. My ſoul was in a tumult—my brain on fire; ſcarce could I reſtrain from venting my rage, diſappointment, and vexation; but I knew that conduct would not anſwer my purpoſe; and in my commerce with mankind, I had learned to curb my feelings; under the ſhackles of politeneſs, I had often been obliged to wear the ſmile of content, while my heart was rent with anguiſh; it was, therefore, leſs

difficult to me to affect a pleaſure I could not feel, and profeſs myſelf ſtill more warmly his friend, than it would have been to one leſs hackneyed in the arts of life, and De Valcourt became the dupe of my profeſſions; though, had he been leſs occupied with his own happineſs, my emotions muſt have betrayed to his diſcerning eye, my hypocricy. I inſiſted on his reſiding in the ſame hotel with me, and ſharing my ſervants, my carriage, and every conveniency I enjoyed. To the firſt he readily conſented, but declined the ſecond, ſaying, he had long been accuſtomed to ſupply his own wants, and had, therefore, no need of ſervants or equipage.

" This a little diſconcerted my plans, and I was obliged to truſt to accident to obtain his letters, for I had already reſolved to intercept them, and break off, if poſſible, his connexion with you; yet, as he reſided under the ſame roof with me, I had little doubt of ſucceeding.

" We

" We breakfaſted together the following morning, and before our meal was well finiſhed, he retired to write to you; and I ſtaid within to watch till he concluded.—When I thought he had nearly done, I haſtily entered his apartment, and having previouſly ordered my horſes, entreated he would allow me to ſhew him the environs of London. He readily accepted my propoſal, and committing his letters to the care of a ſervant I had before inſtructed, we ſet out, and for this time I was made eaſy.

" Some days now paſſed in preparations for his appearance at court; a friend of mine was to introduce him, as the only man on whom he had any dependence was dead. I had offered to reſtore the eſtate, and moſt willingly would I have reſigned it on any other conditions than thoſe of promoting his love. We ſpent much of our time together, when it was his delight to talk of Matilda—to recount the many nameleſs trifles which

firſt gave birth to paſſion, and my torment, to liſten to him.

" At length, chagrined by the reception he met with from the king, who having been frequently impoſed on, was become ſuſpicious; and diſappointed at not receiving an anſwer to his letter, he became a prey to anxiety. In vain I endeavoured to divert his melancholy; in vain I drew him to parties of pleaſure; in the midſt of ſociety he ſat abſorbed in reflection, and alive only to his own ſorrows. Yet I was ſelfiſh enough to witneſs this diſtreſs unmoved, while I perſuaded him ſome accident might have detained his firſt, and adviſed him to write a ſecond letter, which I alſo ſecured; but my heart ſmote me, and I believe I ſhould not have carried the deception on much longer, had not circumſtances favoured my deceit.

" Three days after I had obtained his ſecond letter, my father ſent for me, and, after harranguing for ſome time on his paternal

ternal regard, his anxiety to ſee me advantageouſly ſettled, aſſured me he had procured an alliance for me with the daughter of Lord Mountſhannon, and expected implicit obedience on my part, as the lady poſſeſſed a large fortune; and we were to ſet out on a viſit to the caſtle where ſhe reſided, in a few days, all the preliminaries having been for ſome time arranged, though he would not inform me whilſt I had power to retreat, knowing the natural inclination of ſons to thwart the kind intentions of their fathers.

"Scarce could I hear him to an end, when, half frantic with joy, I danced about the room, thanked him for his kindneſs, confeſſed I had ſeen the lady, who was, beyond all other women, formed to make me happy—urged our immediate departure—aſked a thouſand queſtions, to which I had not patience to wait a reply.

"From him I flew to your father, whoſe coldneſs, for a moment, chilled my raptures. He treated my connexion with his family as a mere matter of intereſt; told me that as his daughter's fortune was ſubject to her mother's controul, he had thought it neceſſary to make a parade of reformation, as women, when poſſeſſed of power, knew not how to uſe it, and he muſt ſtoop to accommodate her whims, before he could hope any propoſal of his would be accepted; but as he ſhould take a party with him, he hoped to make the time paſs pleaſantly enough among the frowning pictures of his gothic anceſtors.

"Shocked at his unfeeling conduct, and not doubting but we had been ſold by our reſpective fathers, perhaps ſtaked on a die, I was turning from him with diſguſt, when he ſtopped me to inquire if I could lend him a ſervant, as he wanted to diſpatch one to the caſtle, and knew not how to ſpare any of his own. Pleaſed with this opportunity of ob-

obtaining intelligence, I offered one of mine, not only to go on his meſſage, but to remain there till I ſhould arrive, which he accepted, ſaying, he ſuppoſed the attendants there would want ſome one to humanize them.

" I then returned to De Valcourt, and after informing him that I and my father were among the number of gueſts who would accompany his lordſhip home, expreſſed my fears that the reformation he had told me of, and on which he ſo much relied, was a mere trick to delude, though I did not acquaint him with the cauſe of my ſuſpicions. " I will myſelf inform them of your fears, then," returned he, " for I have determined to return there this day, as I can no longer endure this ſuſpenſe, but will know my doom from Matilda's own lips; I ſhall then have fortitude enough to ſuſtain the ſhock."

" I was now obliged to uſe every argument in my power to diſſuade him from his

purpoſe. What, ſaid I, will the King think—what will thoſe friends of mine think who have undertaken your cauſe, if, while he yet heſitates how to receive you, and aſſures you he is endeavouring to find proofs of your identity, you ſhould quit London? Will it not confirm any ſuſpicion that may have ariſen in their minds? Beſides, I am now going to diſpatch a ſervant of my own there, and ſhall, in a few days, be able to learn myſelf from your Matilda, the cauſe of her ſilence."

"After much perſuaſion, he yielded to my reaſons, though with evident reluctance; and then, to divert his mind from again purſuing the ſame ideas, I buſied him about his concerns, introduced him to your father, who had been known to his, and might, I thought, recollect ſome circumſtances that would have corroborated his hiſtory; but too ſelfiſh to intereſt himſelf for a ſtranger unknown and unfriended, he perſiſted in refuſing to remember any of the events with which

which De Valcourt endeavoured to impreſs his mind; and to his conduct I am inclined to impute the diſgraceful diſmiſſion from court he has met with ſince I quitted London. Prepared for his errand, my ſervant was a ſpy on your actions, who not only found means, by his inſinuating addreſs, to obtain for me, without ſuſpicion, all the letters De Valcourt has ſince written; but, as you know, has become ſo great a favourite in the family, as to change my ſervice for your's.

"The day was at length fixed for our departure, and De Valcourt, who ſtill relied on my friendſhip, conjured me to give him immediate information from the caſtle. I wrote the day after my arrival, but concealing the kind enquiries you had made, and the anxiety viſible in your countenance, endeavoured to perſuade him he was no longer beloved—no longer the object of tender ſolicitude, uſing every argument to rouſe his pride. In this, however, I was not ſucceſsful;

ful; my intelligence only awakened his jealouſy, without repreſſing his love, or raiſing his reſentment; and I found again a new difficulty in ſubduing his fears.

" But I have already tired you with this diſagreeable recital—ſuffice it then to ſay, I have, by various artifices, amuſed him during my ſtay here, and even after he had diſcovered that his letters were intercepted, he had no ſuſpicion of me. Sickening at the long protracted hope, and fearing from my rival's impatience, any longer delay might lead to the detection of all my deceits, and diſpleaſed with the attentions Mandeville had ever ſhewn you, I reſolved, on the maſquerade night, by hovering round you, not only to obſerve him more cloſely, but when your ſpirits were elated with the joy I thought the ſcene muſt inſpire, make one more effort to awaken in your boſom affection—to gain ſome faint return of paſſion. Intereſted as I was in obſerving every change in you, I could not but remark the

the alteration in your manners from the moment De Valcourt ſpoke, and through his deep diſguiſe, proclaimed his preſence to the ear of love. Your voice was tremulous —your eyes were rivetted on him—your words betrayed your inward agitation, while you liſtened to the Viſcount and myſelf with evident conſtraint.

" Alarmed by theſe circumſtances, I obſerved him more cloſely, and thinking I remembered his voice, watched him as he drew you through the rooms; where having a ſlight glimpſe of his face in the hall, my fears were confirmed; when, following till you again joined the maſkers, I retired, and prevailing on the old ſervant to provide me a dreſs once more, returned, and in this diſguiſe detained him from you: Not content with this, yet without forming any fixed plan to myſelf, or entertaining any hope of ſucceſs from my conduct, half urged by deſpair, I followed about the walks to prevent, if poſſible, his ſpeaking to you; and

it

it was at a moment when ſurpriſed by my preſence, he had turned angrily away, that I received the note which induced me to inſult you with my preſence. Your conduct on that occaſion, added to the compunction I before felt, recalled me to virtue. I have now a motive—your promiſed friendſhip—to lead me in future to act worthy the character of a man."

Then advancing and taking a hand of each, " Can you, do you cordially forgive me, for the contemptible part I have acted? —and will you, as a proof of that forgiveneſs, grant me the pardon of another criminal; I mean the ſervant whom my gold corrupted: I do not expect your unconditional forgiveneſs, only that you will allow him to return to my ſervice without farther enquiry. I will ſend him immediately to London, where I ſhall ſoon follow, when I will endeavour if poſſible, to convince him of his error, and, by my future example, prove to him that my own principles are changed.

changed. But I could not bear to reflect, that while I, the principal—the corrupter, was permitted to enjoy your friendſhip, and all the privileges of my rank and ſtation, he, the leſs wicked agent, ſhould be turned friendleſs and unprotected on the world, deprived, through loſs of character, of the means of obtaining, by honeſt induſtry, his ſubſiſtence—perhaps compelled, by preſſing neceſſity, to violate all the laws of ſociety, and ſinking into vice and infamy, end a life of ſhame and ſorrow, by a premature death."

Matilda, pleaſed with the generoſity of his ſentiments, applauded his conduct, telling him it had helped to diſſipate the anger ſhe could not help feeling againſt him, and which all her efforts had not been able wholly to ſuppreſs, though her anger had been mixed with admiration of his candour. Lady Mountſhannon approved his juſtice, but as ſhe was pleaſed with the man's abilities, and had liked him from his firſt introduction,

duction, refuſed to part with him; adding, ſhe thought it would be much more likely to produce reformation in him, if ſhe, whom he had injured, after gently chiding him for his errors, and by arguments addreſſed to his reaſon, convincing him of the miſchiefs his frauds muſt produce to his fellow creatures, ſhould retain him in her ſervice, treating him with unabated kindneſs, than any thing Sir Charles could do. Both Matilda and the Baronet acknowledged the force of her reaſoning, and the company being now aſſembled, they went to the breakfaſt parlour, where Sir Charles, as he led Matilda to her ſeat, encountered the angry glances of the Viſcount; but, regardleſs of his menacing frowns, he ſeated himſelf by her ſide, and thereby increaſed the ill nature, and added to the mortification of his rival; while ſhe, who now felt his company a relief from the addreſſes of the Viſcount, chatted with more than uſual freedom.

CHAP. X.

Man is to man the ſoreſt, ſureſt ill.—
A previous blaſt foretells the coming ſtorm;
O'erwhelming turrets threaten e're they fall;
Volcanoes bellow e're they diſembogue;
Earth trembles ere her yawning jaws devour;
And ſmoke betrays the wide conſuming fire.
Ruin from man is moſt conceal'd when near,
And ſends the dreadful tidings in the blow.

BEATTY.

LADY Mountſhannon now fully convinced of her huſband's hypocriſy, and irritated by the unfeeling bargain he had made, to barter the future happineſs of his child, ſhrunk from every kind of intercourſe with him; and paid, with reſerve, thoſe civilities her ſituation required towards him. The painful reflections of her mind, threw a gloom

gloom over her countenance, and created a reſtraint in her manners which ſeemed to ſpread its influence over the whole party; while his Lordſhip, preſſed by the Viſcount on the one hand, and alarmed on the other by the increaſing familiarity of the Baronet and his daughter, could neither conceal his vexation, diſſipate his embarraſſment, or aſſume his uſual vivacity.

Lord Ormond alone of all the group, appeared perfectly happy, and by his efforts, ſaved the company from ſinking into total apathy. The advances his ſon ſeemed to have made in the favour both of Matilda and her mother, entirely removed his anxiety; he had now no doubt of accompliſhing his ſchemes, whether Lord Mountſhannon, whom he had been ſome time inclined to fear, intended to act honeſtly or not.

The party at length ſeparated, to purſue for the morning their ſeveral amuſements; and Matilda, who though pleaſed with the friend-

friendſhip of Sir Charles, the confidence ſhe could now repoſe in him, and relieved from the weight of ſorrow which filled her mind, while trembling for De Valcourt's ſafety, or even while ſhe thought her father oppoſed her love, and detained her letters, was yet too much oppreſſed by his abſence, and the uncertainty which ſtill huug over her fate, to be quite eaſy in company, retired gladly to enjoy her beloved ſolitude. The Baronet too, whoſe mind was ſtruggling between his newly awakened love of juſtice, and his yet unſubdued paſſion, (broke abruptly from his father, who would have detained him to vent the ebulition of his joy, and adviſe him how to make the moſt advantage of the impreſſion he vainly fancied his ſon had already made on the heart of Matilda, to indulge in ſecret, the mixed emotions of his boſom.

Though reſolved to ſubdue his own feelings, and leave her at full liberty to beſtow her hand on another without perſecution, Sir Charles, who had found from this ſhort

trial,

trial, how impoſſible it would be to live long in her preſence, to liſten to her converſation, and witneſs the thouſand nameleſs graces that firſt attracted him, yet preſerve his reſolution, was vainly endeavouring to find ſome excuſe, either for quitting the caſtle, or breaking off the intended union at once, when he was relieved from his perplexity by the entrance of his father, with letters from London.

Lord Ormond, who had long been ſoliciting ſome poſt in the government, was by theſe letters, appointed to an important embaſſy, which would take him immediately from England, to the Court of Spain, and he came now to acquaint his ſon with this pleaſing intelligence, to inform him of the nature of his contract with Lord Mountſhannon, and being unwilling to relinquiſh one object while he graſped at another, to aſſure him he ſhould leave him to proſecute his amour; while, by ſoliciting the conſent of Lord and Lady Mountſhannon, for their

ſon

ſon Mountford to accompany him to the Continent, he meant to poſſeſs himſelf of a kind of hoſtage for the fidelity of the one, and the complaiſance of the other.

Sir Charles thanked him for his provident care, but inſiſted on accompanying him a part of the way; to which, the old Lord thinking he had made ſufficient progreſs in Matilda's affection to quit her for a ſhort time, at length conſented; and his ſon, pleaſed with the opportunity which now offered, of being at liberty to act as he pleaſed during his father's abſence, without fear of oppoſition in the preſent ſtate of his feelings, was content to liſten to his prolix advice, and promiſed to be guided by his judgment as much as the feelings of his heart would permit.

Lord Ormond, eager to obey the royal mandate, determined to go ſome ſtages before night, loſt no time in preſenting his petition to Lady Mountſhannon for her ſon's company,

company, which he urged with the politeneſs of a courtier, ſetting forth the advantages of ſuch a tour with all the plauſibility he was maſter of: while Mountford, who had long felt a wiſh to ſee the world, to mingle with ſociety, and whoſe heart bounded at the approaching proſpect of gratifying his wiſhes, entreated her permiſſion with the energetic ardor of youthful eloquence.

Though his Lordſhip was not exactly the man ſhe would have choſen to introduce her ſon into life, yet as his moral character was unimpeached, and ſhe could make no reaſonable objection to his guardianſhip for a few months; and as Mountford's principles, young as he was, were well formed, as he muſt ſoon unavoidably mix with the world, ſoon be left to the guidance of his own reaſon, and be directed by that underſtanding ſhe had taken ſuch pains to expand, ſhe gave an unreluctant conſent.

Secure

Secure of the only obſtacle he had ever feared to his wiſhes, Lord Ormond found no difficulty in obtaining the Earl's conſent to his ſon's departure; who, beſides the relief he found in the idea of his Lordſhip's approaching abſence in the preſent juncture of affairs, had yet another ſource of joy in the proſpect of Mountford's removal; as Lady Mountſhannon would be deprived of his ſupport in the conteſt likely to enſue between them; and as he had no very high ideas of female courage, he thought it would not be difficult to terrify Matilda and her mother, when left to themſelves, into his meaſures.

Lord Ormond, after taking a ſlight repaſt, departed, leaving Sir Charles and Mountford to follow the next day, and the Caſtle was again, for this night, a ſcene of feſtivity. A new drama was exhibited, but Matilda's ſpirits were not now harmonized to receive impreſſions of joy; the ſcene appeared to drag heavily, and ſhe felt how inadequate out-

ward circumſtances are to baniſh care; ſhe dreaded the deprivation ſhe ſhould ſuffer in the loſs of Mountford, and regretted the neceſſary abſence of Sir Charles, who was become very intereſting to her. With a heavy heart ſhe ſeparated for the ſecond time in her life, from her beloved brother; Lady Mountſhannon preſſed him to her boſom, and as he kiſſed off the tear that bedewed her cheek, conjured him to keep in mind the leſſons of virtue he had learned, to ſhun the dangerous temptations which would allure him at every ſtep.

With the moſt fervent aſſurances of his ſtrict adherence to the precepts of moral virtue he had been early taught; he endeavoured to comfort her mind, and reconcile her to the approaching ſeparation; for warm as were the affections of Mountford, he yet felt the pain of parting leſs ſevere than his mother or Matilda, impreſſed with the vivid ſcenes his imagination had pictured in the world he was about to enter.

For

For ſome time after their departure, every thing remained quiet at the Caſtle; Lord Mountſhannon continuing to treat his wife and daughter with kindneſs, Matilda felt no other inquietude than what aroſe from De Valcourt abſence, and the perſecuting addreſſes of the Viſcount, who, left without a rival, was not to be reſtrained, though ſhe had repeatedly rejected his offers with a firmneſs that muſt have convinced any man, leſs a coxcomb, of her ſettled diſlike, as her manners had ever been equally free from diſdain, as from that trifling vanity, which gratified by the love, while indifferent to the lover, encourages the paſſion it pretends to repel.

Tired at length of waiting for the poſſeſſion of the woman, who, both by her fortune and merit, would render him an object of envy to Sir Charles, the man that had ſo often made him feel his own inferiority; the Viſcount urged his Lordſhip to exert his authority and complete the union; who, re-

lieved from many of his former embarraſſments, now openly declared to Lady Mountſhannon his intentions, at the ſame time threatening Matilda with the ſevereſt effects of his vengeance, if ſhe refuſed to comply.

Lady Mountſhannon, pleaſed with this opportunity of relieving her mind from the painful ſecrecy under which it had ſo long laboured, and finding reſerve would be no longer ſerviceable, acquainted her huſband with Matilda's previous engagement to De Valcourt, and her own knowledge of his baſeneſs, in having ſold his daughter both to the Viſcount and Sir Charles; concluding with aſſuring him, in mild, but reſolute terms, that ſhe would ſupport her in the right of judging for herſelf, in a point where her happineſs or miſery was to be the reſult—a right to which every human being was entitled—though, as a friend, ſhe had, and would continue, to direct her conduct, reminding him, when every other argument failed, how little

power

power he had, even in the eye of the law, over the perſon or property of his child.

Burſting with rage, diſappointment, and mingled ſhame, he was at firſt unable to give vent to his vexation; but every hope of ſucceeding by artful management, being now fled, he ſoon gave looſe to his paſſions; ſwore De Valcourt was a vagabond—an impoſtor—incapable of proving his right to the title he claimed; or, if he could, he would even then be a beggar, unworthy of ranking with his family.

After vainly endeavouring to convince him of De Valcourt's worth, and the inſignificancy of titles and riches, when put it competition with moral and intellectual excellence; ſhe remained ſilent, and cooled by her arguments, and impreſſive, but calm manners, his Lordſhip had again recourſe to entreaties; he flattered, ſued, and implored, till, finding his threats and perſuaſions, equally vain, he left her, proclaiming with

a menacing voice, as he retired, the power of a huſband, threatening to cruſh her feeble oppoſition, and make her a terrible victim to his juſt revenge, ſhould ſhe dare to perſiſt.

Smiling at his impotent rage, ſhe ſuffered him to depart without an effort to ſoften, or even detain him, and when left to herſelf, endeavoured to purſue her uſual duties with compoſure.

She ſent for the Viſcount, whom ſhe attempted to convince, that his preſent purſuit muſt end either in miſery or defeat; aſſuring him Matilda's heart was devoted to another; and urging him by all the arguments that could awaken his pride, or intereſt his benevolence, to relinquiſh his ſuit, and no longer provoke her contempt. But ſhe knew not that ſhe thus gave him a new motive for perſevering, ſhe had ſpoken of a ſucceſsful rival, without naming the man, and his ideas naturally turning to the Baronet,

net, he would now have taken Matilda, for the mere pleaſure of mortifying him, independently of every pecuniary advantage: beſide, the preſent application to himſelf, betrayed, in his opinion, ſome fear in her Ladyſhip, and inclined him to think ſhe would, if once the marriage were ſolemnized, either by fraud or violence, for her daughter's ſake, reſtore the fortune; he, therefore, refuſed to abandon his hopes, while his paſſion was ſanctioned by his Lordſhip.

Finding ſhe had nothing to hope, but from ſteady oppoſition, yet, ſuperior to that reſentment, which, in narrow minds, vents itſelf in petty ebullitions of anger, and imbitters all the ſocial hours of life, Lady Mountſhannon took her uſual ſeat at table, and ſeemed equally willing to diſpenſe happineſs, now her huſband had thrown off the maſk, as when her expectations of his future conduct were higheſt. It was enough with her, to reſiſt with firmneſs, where the

rights of nature were violated; the oppoſers of injuſtice, ſhould, ſhe thought, be mild, firm, and courageous; uninfluenced by paſſion, or ſelfiſh feeling; unbiaſſed by reſentment, and actuated only by the wiſh of preſerving their own happineſs, or the happineſs of others, from the encroachments of public or domeſtic tyranny.

Deceived by her conduct, while ignorant of the motives that induced it, Lord Mountſhannon fondly flattered himſelf ſhe had, from fear, yielded to his wiſhes, though unwilling, from female pride, to acknowledge it; nor would he abandon the idea, till after repeated efforts to mould her to his purpoſe—nor till ſhe had ordered Matilda to keep her room, to ſhun the inſults of her lover, who laughed at her reſiſtance, and ſpoke of her as his intended bride, in defiance of all her oppoſition. Yet, even after this, as his Lordſhip ſtill treated her with kindneſs, ſhe began to hope he had relented, and would, in time, relinquiſh his purpoſe.

Amidſt

Amidſt theſe mortifications Matilda, was ſoothed by a letter from De Valcourt, filled with the warm effuſions of his manly heart; acquainting her he waited only till his friend, Beaumont, had made ſome arrangements which would enable him to accompany him to England, before he ſhould return to clear his character, and, once more, enjoy her ſociety.

Lady Mountſhannon, too, received intelligence from Mountford, who had arrived ſafe in France, and who related to her, with the ingenuous ſimplicity that formed his character, the little errors he had been guilty of, and the many blunders his ignorance of the world had led him into. This was ſoothing to her maternal boſom, ſolicitous for his welfare; for, while he could thus communicate his actions, ſhe had little reaſon to fear his heart would be corrupted.

In the ſame packet came, alſo, a letter from Sir Charles, that both pained and pleaſed; pained, from the deep melancholy which ſeemed to cloud the writer's mind; and pleaſed, from the ſtrong aſſurances of unaltered friendſhip it contained. He informed them he ſhould ſtay ſome months in France, to diſſipate, by change of ſcene, and variety, the gloom that ſtill hung over him, and obtain fortitude enough to be ſatisfied with friendſhip, where he had once hoped to inſpire love.

As it was now no longer an object of curioſity, to viſit the caſtle, and obſerve the conduct of its owners, as the anxiety that clouded the brow of Lady Mountſhannon, and the reſtleſs inquietude of his Lordſhip, had ſomewhat damped the feſtivity that once prevailed there; and the majority of its inmates having followed Lord Ormond to London, it had been, for ſome time, almoſt deſerted; and Matilda being ſtill, by her mother's advice, ſhut up in her own room,

it

it was with difficulty, the Viſcount and his Lordſhip, could find ſufficient amuſement to divert the tedious day.

On the fourth evening of her confinement, after returning from her mother's apartment, Matilda ſat late indulging the gloomy ſadneſs of her heart, which had been greatly encreaſed by obſerving, that anxiety of mind viſibly preyed on the health of Lady Mountſhannon, who had vainly endeavoured, that night, to inſpire her daughter with a confidence ſhe was, herſelf, far from feeling; till oppreſſed by the melancholy ideas that crouded faſt on her mind, ſhe retired to reſt. But ſo ſtrongly was her imagination impreſſed with her waking thoughts, ſo deeply had her preſent painful ſituation, and the dread of future evil, engroſſed all her faculties, that her ſlumbers were diſturbed with viſions of horror.

Harraſſed by her father's image through the night, and driven by him from every

place where ſhe had taken ſhelter, till, at length, deſpairing of eſcape, and beginning to relax in her reſiſtance, and ſink into quiet reſignation, ſhe was ſuddenly plunged, by his hand, into an open tomb, and while ſhe beheld him, gazing with malicious pleaſure, as ſhe implored his mercy, the earth cloſed over her; ſhe had, no longer, power to ſtruggle; reſpiration ſeemed ſuſpended, and life faſt ebbing away; when, rouſed by the agitation of her mind, ſhe awoke; yet, ſo impreſſive had the dream been, it was ſome moments before ſhe could convince herſelf it was not a dreadful reality.

Before ſhe had well recovered the powers of recollection, the violent ringing of a diſtant bell, again alarmed her fears; ſhe liſtened, but all being immediately ſilent, ſhe endeavoured to reaſon away the ſuperſtitious terrors that aſſailed her; raiſing herſelf in bed, and looking round on familiar objects, faintly diſcovered, by the glimmering of the dim taper in her chimney, ſhe at length

length regained ſome portion of her uſual courage, when Lady Mountſhannon's woman ruſhing in the room, cried, "Riſe, madam—for heaven's ſake, riſe! my Lady—my Lady."—

Completely rouſed by this ſummons, Matilda haſtily dreſſed, and, without ſtaying for further enquiries, flew to her mother's chamber, where the domeſtics aſſembled round the bed, without knowing how to render aſſiſtance, ſtood in ſilent ſorrow. Lord Mountſhannon, himſelf, was adminiſtering a cordial, with much apparent tenderneſs.

She now advanced to witneſs a ſcene that ſhook all her fortitude, to ſee the eye of Lady Mountſhannon bent on vacancy, while ſhe uttered ſome inarticulate ſounds, which ſeemed to agitate her boſom; her face pale, her features diſtorted, and her countenance, where the feelings of the heart were wont to play; where, a few hours before, the energies

of

of thought had ſparkled, ſunk in total imbecility.

Kneeling by her bed-ſide, ſhe preſſed the unconſcious hand to her boſom, and, in an agony of grief, cried, "Oh! do you not know me, my mother! will you not regard your own Matilda."

The vehemence with which ſhe uttered theſe words, rouſed, even, the ſenſeleſs figure before her, who gazed, attentively, in her face, while a faint gleam of returning recollection beamed over her countenance, as ſhe ſeemed ſtruggling with the confuſion of thought that laboured in her brain, till at length, vainly endeavouring to ſpeak, ſhe uttered a loud ſhriek, and ſunk, exhauſted, on her pillow.

Matilda hid her face in the cloaths, ſtifleing the ſorrow that almoſt burſt her heart. Ah! thought ſhe, how ſhall I ſupport this dreadful trial, without Mountford—without

De

De Valcourt—to direct me by their counſels, or ſooth me with their kindneſs;—yet, ſurely, ſomething may be done, ſaid ſhe, riſing, while I am ſpending the precious time in unavailing ſorrow.

Her father now advanced, and in the moſt ſoothing, tender, accents, entreated her to retire from a ſight that ſo deeply affected her; expreſſing his concern for the ſituation to which his Lady was ſo ſuddenly reduced; and cheering her with the hope, that ſhe would be as ſuddenly reſtored.

This tenderneſs effected for Matilda the relief of tears, who, forgetting every thing but his preſent kindneſs, ſunk on the boſom of her father, and found a temporary alleviation of her ſorrows. She would now have ſent to the village for medical aſſiſtance, but his Lordſhip had already diſpatched a ſervant to the next town, for a man of more celebrity in the profeſſion; and, Matilda, whom no arguments could induce to quit the cham-

chamber, ſat impatiently expecting his arrival.

As Lady Mountſhannon continued in a ſtate of torpid inſenſibility, ſhe had now time to enquire who firſt diſcovered her mother's diſpoſition, and was informed his Lordſhip had raiſed the ſervants, after being himſelf awakened by her groans.

The man of medicine at length arrived, who, with formal bow and ſolemn viſage entered the chamber. Matilda looked earneſtly in his face, and liſtened with profound attention while he uttered many learned phraſes on the nature of the complaint, the ſeat of the brain, and the cauſes which produced mental derangement, but without being able to diſcover, either by his words or looks, what ſhe had to hope or fear, till he began in more intelligible language to order that his patient ſhould be immediately taken from her bed, and every effort uſed to rouſe her from the torpor that benumbed her faculties;

ties; adviſing her to be moved, as change of air would be moſt likely to effect her recovery.

All was now buſtle and preparation. Matilda prevailed on the phyſician to attend her mother's removal. The old coach was ordered to be got ready, while ſhe aſſumed compoſure enough to prepare the few things neceſſary for their journey, flattering herſelf with the hope of ſoon witneſſing a favourable change.

Lady Mountſhannon, who ſuffered every neceſſary office to be performed about her perſon with ſtupid indifference, was ſoon dreſſed, and being placed in the carriage, Matilda was haſtily following, when ſhe was met by her father, who taking her hand, ſaid, in a ſoftened voice, "You are not, ſurely, you are not going to attend your mother? you who are already overcome with diſtreſs and terror!—No, your eye is haggard—your cheek pale—your hand trembles

in

in mine; I cannot, will not allow you to risk so much, my Matilda; it must not be, your mother has every necessary attendance; we will follow in a few hours, but at present you must compose yourself, must take rest."

In vain she assured him her health would suffer less from personal exertion, than from the severe anxiety her mind would feel while in a state of separation; in vain, sinking on the floor, and grasping his knees, she entreated, with a kind of wild energy, he would permit her to be gone; in vain she represented, with that simple eloquence feeling inspires, the anguish her mother would suffer, should she have an interval of reason, to find herself thus deserted by her child. He was deaf to her entreaties; when tired with these ineffectual efforts to move him, fearing too, the coach might depart while she thus parleyed, with indignation glowing in her countenance, she rose, and crying, "Who shall restrain me the path of duty," rushed forward with such impetuosity, that she

ſhe had aſcended the ſteps of the carriage before his lordſhip could overtake her; who then ſeizing her in his arms, hurried her back, bidding the coachman drive away, while ſhe continued ſcreaming to him to ſtop, till her voice failing, her ſtrength being exhauſted, ſhe was carried in a ſtate of inſenſibility to her chamber. A few moments, however, reſtored her to recollection, and as ſhe looked through the caſement of her window, the carriage was ſlowly proceeding along the road by the village; the diſtance was not great, and ſhe could eaſily diſcern the tenantry as they followed, eager to gain a ſight of their protectreſs, the news of whoſe illneſs had already alarmed them.

Unable to endure a ſight which rouſed all the anguiſh of her heart, and determined to make another effort to follow her mother, ſhe haſtened to the door of her apartment, but to her extreme mortification, it was faſt. She then looked wiſtfully from the window; the wall was high, yet in her preſent ſtate of

mind

mind ſhe would have attempted to leap it, and end her ſuſpence, had ſhe not juſtly ſuppoſed the outer gates would be guarded to prevent her eſcape, and ſhe ſhould only expoſe herſelf to new violence. After pacing her chamber for ſome time, ſhe cried "Why ſhould I thus waſte my ſpirits in fruitleſs complaints, and thus yield myſelf a willing priſoner?—No, I will not ſhrink—I will ſee my father, he cannot delight in paining the being to whom he has given life. Perhaps I was too impetuous in urging my requeſt—had I continued calmly to explain the reaſons that induced my wiſh, he would certainly have been convinced; I have injured the juſtice of my cauſe by my impatience—have given him reaſon to believe me actuated by the fury of oppoſition, rather than the reſoves of judgment." Full of theſe ideas, ſhe rang the bell, and having written a note to her father, ſlid it under the door, and deſired the ſervant to convey it immediately to him. She now endeavoured to compoſe her mind, and places her reaſons in the ſtrongeſt

point

point of view; but her courage half forſook her, as ſhe recollected, for the firſt time, the myſterious manner in which her mother had been ſeized—the ſingularity of her father's being the firſt alarmed—of his ſending for a ſtrange phyſician, and hurrying her away, without any one knowing whither. Yet all this might really happen by accident; and his wiſh in detaining her might be to afford her time to recover the ſhock, and obtain reſt. Unwilling to harbour ſuſpicions, ſhe ſtrove to baniſh theſe painful ideas from her mind.

Lord Mountſhannon readily obeyed her ſummons: he was not naturally inclined to be cruel, or inflict pain to gratify a malevolent diſpoſition; and, as he really felt ſome affection for Matilda, he beheld with regret her preſent ſufferings; even Lady Mountſhannon would ever have been free from his perſecutions, had ſhe not found it neceſſary to oppoſe his deſigns. But as he endeavoured to perſuade himſelf he was not doing his daughter

daughter any lasting injury, in uniting her to a man of title and fortune, he came determined to resist all her entreaties, and acquaint her with his resolution to detain her prisoner till she consented to become the wife of Mandeville. He knew her romantic passion for De Valcourt would lead her at first to oppose his designs; but, as in his opinion, the soft mind of woman easily admitted impressions that were as easily effaced, he had no doubt but she would, if he could keep her separate from her mother, yield to the Viscount's ardour, so flattering to her vanity, and his own threats, calculated to inspire terror; and once united, the splendour of his rank—the new scenes to which she would be introduced, and the total change that must take place in her situation, would, he thought, obliterate every remembrance of past evil. Deceived too, by the general idea, that one ruling passion directed the whole sex—that riches, show, and splendour were the universal objects of their pursuit, he fondly fancied she would, at some future

future period, thank him for his care; unconscious that Matilda, reared in solitude, ignorant of the fopperies of life, had attained greater strength of character. And thus having argued away, as well as he was able, the remorse that stung his bosom, he began, without giving her an opportunity to renew her entreaties, to declare his purpose,

She heard him to the end, with a mixture of surprise, indignation, and horror; and then, with a firmness which almost made him repent the lengths he had gone, bid him mark, that her's was not the language of passion—yet she solemnly declared she would endure the most cruel death, rather than unite herself to the Viscount; that detesting his principles and unfeeling conduct, she would not submit to be his, was her heart wholly at liberty. To give her hand where her affection never had been, never could be given, was a mere state of prostitution, for which she was unfitted, both by sentiment and education. "I am resolved, my lord," con-

continued ſhe, " and though I know the evils your power may make me ſuffer, yet my reſolution will never change; my diſlike ariſes from ſettled principles, and cannot alter; therefore, in mercy deſiſt: and, oh! if pity has any place in your boſom, ſend me to my mother. Indeed—indeed, there is no ſacrifice, but the dreadful one you require, I will not make to promote your happineſs, if you will grant me this favour. Speak—ſpeak, my father—ſay I am at liberty to depart, and name any terms but theſe, and I will yield unreluctant obedience."

Affected by her agitation, he endeavoured to compoſe her mind; aſſured her, Lady Mountſhannon was in good hands—that in a few hours he ſhould have intelligence concerning her, when, if ſhe would but conſent to the marriage he had ſo much at heart, and for which every thing was already prepared, ſhe might go immediately to her.

Matilda

Matilda ſhook her head, determined not to ſpeak again on that ſubject; when, after trying various means to induce her to change her reſolution—after threatening, entreating, and careſſing to no purpoſe, he retired, and carefully cloſing the door after him, left her once more to the ſolitary conſolation of her own reflections.

It was now ſhe felt all the horrors of her ſituation more fully than ever; more ſtrongly now ſhe feared her mother's indiſpoſition had been cauſed by artful management; ſhe had read of potions to ſtupify the brain, and trembling at the idea, regretted that ſhe had conſented to her departure—that ſhe had intruſted her to the care of a ſtranger, perhaps the agent of her father's ſchemes. A chain of dreadful thoughts ſucceeded each other with ſuch rapidity as benumbed her faculties, and rendered her mind chaotic.

When her dinner was brought, Lord Mountſhannon himſelf waited at the door,

fearing the compaſſion, with which the powerful pleadings of Matilda might inſpire the ſervant. Her head was reſting on her hand, in motionleſs deſpair—no tear relieved the thrilling anguiſh of her boſom, or the fever of her brain. She raiſed her eyes as they entered, and the tear of ſympathy trickling down the cheek of the old domeſtic, as ſhe placed the food on the table, raiſed a gleam of hope, till beholding the viſage of her father, now become hateful to her ſight, her head dropped, and deſpair again ſpread its chilling influence over her.

With little inclination to eat, yet faint with grief, and exhauſted by fatigue, Matilda endeavoured, but in vain, to ſwallow a few mouthfuls; ſhe however drank a little wine, and found herſelf refreſhed; but the very nouriſhment which gave vigour to her body, increaſed the anguiſh of her mind.

The ſhades of night had for ſome time darkened the atmoſphere; Matilda had lighted

ed her lamp, and was ſetting by its melancholy glimmer, wholly abſorbed in her own more melancholy ideas, when a gentle tapping at her door broke her reverie. She walked towards it, uttering a deep ſigh, and a voice through the key-hole, bade her take a paper from underneath, and return an anſwer in half an hour, ſuſpended by a ſtring from her window.

Haſtily opening the paper, written in a hand ſcarce legible, and which, after much difficulty in decyphering the characters, ſhe found was an offer of ſervice from the man, who, at the inſtigation of Sir Charles, had betrayed her letters. He told her his maſter was going to ſend him from the caſtle that night, on buſineſs of importance, and from the hints he had dropped, he believed it was to attend his lady, to whom he would deliver any letter or meſſage from herſelf, or execute any commiſſion to benefit her, however dangerous; concluding by entreating her to truſt him, and not let his paſt conduct

prevent her confidence, as he ſhould feel ſeverely, if deprived of the opportunity of ſerving her.

There was ſomething in this artleſs epiſtle which proclaimed it honeſt; yet Matilda, rendered ſuſpicious by the ill ſhe had ſuffered, heſitated, and again peruſed its contents before ſhe could determine. The man had once deceived her; and this might be ſome plan to entangle, of which her father meant to take advantage. Yet where could ſhe be more in his power than ſhe was in her preſent ſituation, or how could he inflict more than he had already threatened? Her fears appearing ridiculous, ſhe reſolved to truſt the man, thinking it more juſt, as well as more generous, to impute his preſent offers of ſervice to the wiſh of effacing his paſt baſeneſs, than to ſuppoſe he was again practiſing to betray—ſhe therefore wrote a few lines to Lady Mountſhannon, to be delivered if ſhe were capable of reading them, informing her ſhe was detained from attending her at preſent;

ſent; but ſpeaking as lightly of her confinement as poſſible, to prevent giving alarm. Theſe ſhe incloſed in a paper addreſſed to the ſervant, deſiring him to return with what intelligence he could gain, which he might communicate to Mary, who would find ſome means of conveying it to her; when tying her packet with a ſtring, ſhe liſtened impatiently for the ſignal, which at length hearing, ſhe haſtily threw it from the window; but, as ſhe cloſed the caſement, hearing a noiſe like ſome one approaching in the walk beneath, ſhe extinguiſhed her light, that ſhe might more clearly diſcern who it was, but to no purpoſe, ſhe could only obſerve two perſons ſlowly retiring from the ſpot, and heard diſtinctly the ſound of voices, ſometimes low, then high, ſpeaking in tones of anger and ſupplication.

"Ah! wretched Matilda," cried ſhe, ſinking on her chair, and again yielding to the deſpair that overwhelmed her, and which this little exertion had for a time ſuſpended,

" is then thy new created hope alſo vaniſhed—is the only being who has made an effort to ſerve thee, then diſcovered, and perhaps driven far from the poſſibility of again ſoothing thee with hope?"

But ſhe had not ſat long, when the door opened, and the Viſcount entered, preceded by a ſervant with lights. She ſprung haſtily from her ſeat, and before he had power to detain her, reached a cloſet in the room, and cloſing the door, refuſed to return. In vain he entreated her once again to hear him—once more to admit him to her preſence, and pleaded in vain, the violence of his paſſion in excuſe for his conduct. She heard him with contempt, aſſuring him he had forfeited all claim to her eſteem; and that while ſhe was detained a priſoner on his account, deprived the poor conſolation of attending the ſick couch of a beloved parent—of a parent, who, as well as herſelf, was, ſhe feared the victim of his cruel perſeverance, ſhe would never either ſee or converſe with him more.

After

After more than an hour ſpent in fruitleſs efforts, he thought proper to retire, and leave Matilda to paſs the tedious night comfortleſs and ſolitary, without one pang of remorſe, or one ſigh of regret for the woman he thus perſecuted, while he pretended to love.

For ſeveral ſucceſſive days did ſhe thus ſhun the Viſcount; and when once forcibly detained in his preſence by her father, ſhe maintained an obſtinate ſilence, in defiance of the threats of the one, and entreaties of the other.

Though thus emboldened to reſiſt arbitrary power, and repreſs the ſelfiſh being who called himſelf a lover, ſhe was moſt wretched; unable to form any plan of eſcape, the anxiety that preyed on her mind, added to the cloſe confinement of her perſon, injured her health; while the torpor of deſpair benumbed all her powers. Expectation no longer exiſted to keep her ſpirits in action, and every hope of immediate aſ-

ſiſtance was baniſhed from her boſom, yet ſhe reſolved to perſiſt in her oppoſition till De Valcourt or Mountford arrived, though ſhe dreaded to reflect on her mother's ſufferings, during that tedious interval.

Two days now paſſed without a viſit from the Viſcount, and ſhe began to think, that tired of enduring her contempt, he had at length relinquiſhed his purſuit, and quitted the caſtle, where, from the ſilence that prevailed, ſhe was convinced no gueſts remained; for though her chamber was too diſtant from the inhabited apartments for her to hear much of what paſſed; yet the rattling of carriages, and the trampling of horſes in the court, had, at her firſt confinement, interrupted the ſolemn ſtillneſs.

A little animated by this thought, ſhe made another effort to ſoften her father, and induce him to let her breathe the free air, and exerciſe her limbs, were it only in the long gallery, appealing to her altered countenance, for the neceſſity of ſuch indulgence.

To

To which he anſwered with a ſmile of triumph, ſhe would have air enough to-morrow, and then immediately cloſing the door, left her.

Matilda would fain have interpreted theſe words literally, had not the ſtyle in which they were ſpoken, and his abrupt departure forbade; conjecture ſerved only to perplex, yet ſhe could not help dwelling on his expreſſions, and forming a thouſand vague ſuſpicions of their meaning. Occupied with this train of reflections, ſhe ſat by the faint light of the embers that glowed on the hearth; for though the day had been ſome time cloſed, ſhe had not yet lighted her lamp, when hearing the ſound of footſteps treading heavily along the gallery, ſhe ſtarted; they ſeemed to approach her chamber, and before ſhe had time to form any conjectures, her father entered. He was muffled in a long riding coat that buttoned over the lower part of his face, while the upper part was ſhaded by a large hat—in his right-hand he held a

ſtick—his eyes were fierce, and his whole figure terrific.

"Your conſtancy, madam," ſaid he, ſeizing Matilda's arm, and dragging her forcibly along, "will now ſoon be put to the teſt. I have gone great lengths to overcome your obſtinacy, and unite you to a man of conſequence; I muſt now go ſtill greater to ſave you from the arms of an impoſtor; and though you have wearied the patience of the Viſcount, you will not find it ſo eaſy to tire the members of the church."

Unable from ſurpriſe to reſiſt his force, he had proceeded ſome diſtance towards a back ſtaircaſe, when Matilda, whoſe ſpirits ſeemed to encreaſe with encreaſing difficulties, by a violent ſtruggle, broke from his graſp, and would have fled, but two men in the dreſs of ſailors, ſtarting at his lordſhip's call, from behind a pillar, ſtopped her paſſage.

Shocked

Shocked and ſurpriſed at this violent and myſterious conduct, ſhe burſt into tears, and claſping her hands in an agony of grief, ſhe cried, "O my father! what evils are you about to inflict on your wretched daughter? Let me but know my fate, that I may be prepared to meet it; I cannot endure this ſuſpence, this dreadful myſtery." Then a little recovering her ſpirits, and turning to the men, ſhe ſaid, "Remember you are accomplices in carrying me from this place againſt my will. I have friends who will puniſh any injury done me; and the time will come, when you may, perhaps, repent your injuſtice."

"Take her away," cried his lordſhip, "you know the rout." But, awed by the dignity of her manners and the authoritative tone with which ſhe ſpoke, they attempted not to touch her, though they ſtill guarded the paſſage, while one of them exhorted her to obedience, reminding her how ſecure they

were from future puniſhment, as they acted by her father's orders.

Lord Mountſhannon being tired of theſe harrangues, again graſping her arm, drew her down the ſtairs. They then paſſed through a long paſſage, and entering a trap-door that had been previouſly opened, deſcended a flight of broken ſteps, and groping their way through a long winding labyrinth, formed during the civil wars, for the purpoſe of eſcape; they arrived on the farther ſide of the hill, about a mile diſtant from the caſtle, where two horſes were tied, on one of which they placed Matilda, with a man behind her, while his companion mounting the other, they gallopped off full ſpeed, as his lordſhip returned again to the caſtle, through the cavern they had juſt quitted.

Though the night was dark, they continued their flight through unfrequented roads till day-break, when they alighted at a ſmall

ſmall houſe, where a woman, wrinkled with age, ſtood ready to receive them. Matilda, ſpringing from her horſe, looked anxiouſly round, as the twilight faintly diſcovered objects, for ſome roof to which ſhe might flee for protection; but in vain, a dreary waſte alone ſurrounded this ſolitary dwelling, into which they forced her to enter. When ſhutting her in a chamber, which ſcarce admitted the light of day through a high grated caſement, they brought her ſome cakes and milk. Here ſhe continued till the darkneſs of evening again favouring their eſcape, with equal rapidity they again purſued their journey, avoiding every town and village, or entering them only at midnight, when all was huſhed in ſilence.

CHAP. XI.

——————Led on by her,
Came idiot Superſtition: round with ears,
Innumerous, ſtrew'd, ten thouſand monkiſh forms
With legends play'd them; and with tenets, meant
To charm, or ſcare, the ſimple into ſlaves,
And poiſon Reaſon, groſs, ſhe ſwallows all,
The moſt abſurd believing, ever moſt,
Brood o'er the whole, her univerſal night,
The gloom ſtill doubling, ignorance diffus'd.

THOMSON.

THOUGH Matilda's expectations of eſcaping from her guards were by no means ſanguine, ſhe yet entertained a hope that ſome accident might deliver her from their cuſtody, and that hope was encreaſed, when, on the following day, they reſted in a foreſt, under the ſhelter of a large tree; but no paſſen-

paſſenger paſſed through the long day; no ſound of horſe or carriage approached to cheer her with the proſpect of ſucceſs; no trace of human footſteps appeared near the ſpot; nor was any rude hut to be ſeen.

When night again ſhed it's curtain over the landſcape, they once more purſued their journey with unabating activity, and before morning reached a little hovel by the ſea ſide, ſo uncouthly formed it ſeemed ſcarcely fitted for a human habitation.—Here, as there was no door to faſten, grated window to prevent eſcape, or even wall that would have reſiſted the efforts of a child, they kept her in ſight through the day; while ſhe beheld with anguiſh the veſſels riding in the port, and heard the diſtant noiſe of the buſy ſailor, conſcious ſhe had no means of conveying her complaints, or intereſting the multitude that now ſurrounded her.

Towards evening the men continued to watch through a hole, which ſerved as a window

window to this miſerable dwelling, as if in expectation of ſome perſon; and night was already approaching when Matilda was ſurpriſed by the arrival of her father, unattended; who without addreſſing, or ſcarce regarding her, ordered the men to convey her on board the veſſel. With the faint hope of gaining that protection from ſtrangers her natural guardian refuſed her, ſhe now exerted all her ſtrength; and ſcreaming for help, was borne along the beach, but her voice being unheard, ſhe was placed in the little bark that waited their arrival, where Lord Mountſhannon following, they inſtantly put to ſea, and the wind being fair they ſoon loſt ſight of the veſſels that ſurrounded the ſhore. But they had hardly cleared the land when the night became dark and ſtormy, the wind roſe, and the waves daſhing over the deck rendered it impoſſible to continue there. The ſtorm increaſed; the ſailors ſwore; the commander was diſmayed; all was buſtle, noiſe, and confuſion; while the

little

little bark driven about at the mercy of the wind, now riſing with the ſwelling waves, and now daſhing with impetuous fury down, ſeemed ſinking in the deep. Lord Mountſhannon, terrified by the ſcene, prayed aloud; and aloud formed a covenant with his God to amend his conduct, and devote his life to the ſervice of religion, if he would, in mercy, ſpare him now, and not cut him off in the midſt of his iniquities:—entreated pardon of Matilda, and promiſed, ſhould his life be ſpared to return to England the moment the elements were cleared, and make reparation to his injured family: but ſhe was too ill, with the motion of the veſſel, to attend either to his penitence, or prayers.

The ſtorm ſubſiding with the morning light, and every idea of danger being then ſuſpended, Lord Mountſhannon forgot all the promiſes fear had extorted from him.

They

They now continued to ſail, with a fair wind, to the French coaſt, where they landed without any further accident; when Matilda, who had remained ſo ill, during the whole voyage, as to be wholly inattentive to every concern, was conveyed, almoſt devoid of life or motion, entirely bereft of the powers of recollection, to an Inn: a few hours reſt, however, reſtored her to comparitive health, and ſhe determined to exert every effort to intereſt the people who attended, in her favour. But her ſimple tale made no impreſſion on their minds, his Lordſhip having previouſly aſſured them ſhe was an heretic daughter, whom he had, with much difficulty, ſnatched from diſtruction; and whom he was now going to place in a Convent.

They beheld her tears, and heard her pathetic pleadings, unmoved; awed partly by reverence for the church, but reſtrained more by the dread of eccleſiaſtical ſeverity.

Though

Though his Lordſhip thought leſs ſecreſy neceſſary, now they journeyed through a country, where, from the religious prejudices of the people, and the tale he had already told, he had leſs reaſon to fear a reſcue, than while dragging her through her native country, where any tale of diſtreſs would have been more likely to intereſt; yet, he continued to guard her with the ſtricteſt attention, and ſhe, who expected and dreaded to meet the Viſcount at every ſtage, was ſurpriſed, when towards the cloſe of their third days journey, they ſtopped before the gate of an old Convent. The bell was rang, and Matilda, and his Lordſhip, ſhewn into a ſmall parlor, where they were told the Lady Abbeſs would attend them as ſoon as veſpers were over.

Matilda waited, with anxious expectation, the arrival of this lady, reſolving, ineffectual as her exertions had hitherto been, to make one more effort to obtain juſtice, by appealing both to her judgement, and feelings; and, claiming

ing in the name of the God, to whom ſhe had dedicated her life, protection againſt oppreſſion.

At length, after many ceremonious preliminaries, a tall meagre figure entered the room; the wrinkles of age furrowed her face, where cold inſenſibility ſeemed to reſide; where no intereſting trace of benevolence remained.

Matilda raiſed her eyes, but her heart was chilled by the frozen aſpect of the object ſhe beheld; and her purpoſed appeal half ſuſpended—when, with an air of ſelf importance, and ſpiritual pride, ſhe advanced towards her, ſaying, "Daughter, be of comfort; you are come to the abode of peace." Yet the the habitual ſoftneſs of her voice, and manners, wholly uncongenial with her frigid appearance, a little cheered the drooping ſpirits of Matilda, and led her to ſay, as ſhe continued to praiſe the pure delights of a monaſtic life, and exhort her to be com-

comforted, ſurely the heart of this woman is cold and ſevere, from the auſterity of her life, ſhut out from all the endearing charities which render exiſtence valuable; and her manners are more the effect of a mind, whoſe faculties are repreſſed by the blaſting influence of ſuperſtition, than the reſult of natural inſenſibility.

Thus encouraged, ſhe began her ſhort, but affecting ſtory, with all that energy with which conſcious rectitude inſpires oppreſſed innocence; but on this ſubject, eloquence itſelf would have failed in making any impreſſion on the heart of this bigotted ſuperior, whom Lord Mountſhannon had previouſly prejudiced by a plauſible tale; loading his wife with every diſhonorable epithet, he had informed this lady, that, contrary to his moſt earneſt entreaties, ſhe had inſtilled heretical opinions into the minds of his children; whom ſhe had taught to deſpiſe, and encouraged in every act of rebellion towards him; and who, being now, by the judge-

ment

ment of heaven, deprived the uſe of her reaſon, as the puniſhment of her crimes, he was willing to ſave his offspring from ſharing her calamities in this life, and her puniſhment in the next.

In vain was all Matilda could urge againſt this tale, where truth was ſo blended with falſehood, that her teſtimony ſeemed rather to confirm, than confute his Lordſhip's relation; and ſhe was, at length, deſired, no longer to oppoſe the power, or prejudice the character of her father, who, as the natural guardian of his child, had a right to diſpoſe of her in the way he thought moſt conducive to her happineſs; and without being able to obtain any other ſatisfaction, than a freſh aſſurance, that her mother, who ſtill remained in a ſtate of inſanity, had every attention paid her, at a ſeat of his, near the ſea coaſt, where ſhe had been ordered for the air, Matilda parted from her father. She was now led by one of the attendant ſiſters, to a narrow

narrow cell, where a mattraſs, placed within a ſmall nook, ſerved as a bed—where a wicker bottomed chair, and an old table, almoſt deſtroyed by worms, formed the whole furniture. The once whited walls, now ſhaded by ſmoke, and defaced by the damps that penetrated through the interſtices time had made in the brick-work, were ornamented in various places, by the uncouth efforts of its former inhabitants. In one corner was ſketched a dying ſaint, whoſe diſtorted features, and expiring agonies, drawn by the gloomy imagination of the taſteleſs painter, rendered her appearance ſcarce human; in another, was a death's head, with here and there a crucifix.

The feeble light proceeding from a ſmall lamp placed on the table, ſerving, but indiſtinctly, to diſcover the objects of this miſerable apartment, ſpread an additional horror over the whole; while the ſhrieking of the owl—the flitting of the bat—the hoarſe murmur of the wind, as it ſhook the trees, or whiſtled

whiſtled through the long aiſles, encreaſed the melancholy of the ſcene. But ſo keen was Matilda's preſent anguiſh—ſo great the dejection of her mind—ſo wholly engroſſed were her thoughts and feelings, by inward ſorrow, that outward circumſtances made no impreſſion on her mind; nor could all the powers of ſuperſtition combined, have raiſed in her boſom a fear of greater evils than thoſe ſhe now ſuffered, in being thus torn from all ſhe held dear—ſhut from the world—and deprived even of hope.

She had till this moment, indeed, cheriſhed the deluſive flatteries of this friend to human wretchedneſs; even when forcibly dragged from the caſtle, and left to the mercy of ſtrangers, ſhe had not believed her father's purpoſe ſo very determined; and as during their journey ſhe had often beheld his boſom wrung with momentary compunction, by her pathetic pleading, ſhe had not allowed herſelf to doubt but he would, at length,

length, yield to the feelings of the parent, and the man.

Now, alas! every pleaſing proſpect was vaniſhed—the beings with whom ſhe was placed, jaundiced by early prejudice, would, from motives of miſtaken piety, be more inclined to favour her oppreſſors than afford her relief: though ſhe might intereſt their benevolence, or awaken their pity, their very principles would operate againſt her; deceived by their narrow bigottry, they would think they were performing a meritorious action, if, by depriving her of temporal happineſs, they could, in their own opinion, ſecure her eternal ſalvation.

" And am I really condemned to linger out my exiſtence in this horrible priſon," cried ſhe, as ſhe caſt her eyes around her miſerable cell, " never more to hear the voice of De Valcourt! never more to liſten to the language of love! to remain here forever, ignorant of the fate of my beloved mo-

ther, who, perhaps, at this moment is ſtruggling under the moſt accumulated diſtreſs?" Tortured with the ideas her imagination conjured up, ſhe roſe from her ſeat to pace her narrow apartment, vainly fancying change of ſituation would produce change of ideas. But her knees tottered through weakneſs; for harraſſed with reſtleſs anxiety, ſhe had eaten very little food ſince ſhe had quitted Mountford caſtle; her head grew dizzy, a burning heat pervaded her frame, and extreme thirſt ſeemed to parch her lips. The window was high—ſhe climed the table, vainly endeavouring to remove its maſſy bars, hoping to find relief, could ſhe breathe a freer air; but ruſted by long diſuſe, they reſiſted her feeble efforts, when endeavouring to deſcend, ſhe fell to the ground. The violence of the blow ſhe received in her fall, for ſome time deprived her of the powers of recollection. When ſhe a little recovered, it was only to feel an increaſing pain in her head—her limbs trembled, while alternate fits of ſhuddering coldneſs and oppreſſive

heat

heat rapidly ſucceeded each other; which, aided by the acute anguiſh that now pervaded her body, rendering her unable longer to ſupport her languid frame, ſhe ſunk on her mattreſs, and ſoon became entirely unconſcious of her miſerable ſituation. A brain fever, (the conſequence of grief and fatigue, haſtened, perhaps, by the anguiſh of mind ſhe had that night ſuffered, and the chilling damps of her preſent apartment) ſeized her; and ſo rapid was the progreſs of her diſorder, that before morning ſhe raved of De Valcourt—of her mother's ſufferings—and her father's injuſtice!

The firſt perſon who approached her in this melancholy ſituation was a lay ſiſter, who came to bring her ſome coarſe bread and milk for her breakfaſt. Looking on her with a ſmile of triumph, ſhe cried, as ſhe daſhed the food from her hand, "And are you the poor diminutive feeble wretch that is to guard me, to keep me from my love, and from the reſcue of a parent?—Vain

thought—ah! what an inadequate inſtrument are you to effect ſuch a purpoſe." So ſaying, ſhe ſprang from her mattreſs, and ſeized the terrified trembling nun, whom in the ſtrength of delirium, ſhe proſtrated on the floor, crying, as ſhe haſtened to the door, "I am free!—now I am free!" But her ſtrength failing immediately ſhe ſunk down in a ſtate of paſſive imbecillity, quite exhauſted by her late exertion.

The poor ſiſter, frightened at the ſcene ſhe had juſt witneſſed, no ſooner beheld the quieſent ſtate into which Matilda had fallen, than, eager to eſcape from the preſence of a being ſo terrific, ſhe haſtily quitted the cell, to ſpread alarm through the ſiſterhood, who preſently aſſembled round the invalid.

Deeply read in the legendery tales and pious frauds of juggling prieſts, wholly ignorant of the various diſeaſes to which the human frame is liable—ever fond of converting into miracles the moſt common occurrences

rences of life—and never having ſeen any one under the influence of this diſtemper, this religious ſociety imputed Matilda's malady to a judgment of heaven; and impreſſed with the idea that ſhe was poſſeſſed of a devil, they ſuperſtitiouſly feared to adminiſter comfort to the individual, whom God ſeemed to have marked out as the object of his vengeance.

Thus was ſhe under a dangerous and painful diſeaſe, in the proſpect of being deſerted, left without medical aid, or that ſoothing kindneſs that cheers the bed of ſickneſs, having no friend near, intereſted, to overcome their pious ſcruples, as Lord Mountſhannon had ſet out on his journey homewards, the preceding evening.

It was neceſſary for his lordſhip to quit France immediately, that he might be in the way to intercept the letters of his ſon, and account to him for the ſilence of his mother and ſiſter; beſides, he wiſhed to return to

the caſtle, to learn what credit the report had gained which he ſpread in that neighbourhood, after he had conveyed Matilda ſecretly away, of her having eloped with the Viſcount, whom ſhe had ſo long; and ſo obſtinately refuſed.

Matilda continued to rave for cold water to allay the feveriſh heat, which ſeemed to her diſordered fancy, conſuming her vitals, till melted by the piteous accents in which ſhe implored compaſſion, one of the younger nuns brought her ſome water from the ſpring, and ſome tamarinds, preſented to her by an Engliſh boarder. She greedily drank the water and devoured the fruit, which gave a momentary coolneſs to her burning frame.

The pleaſure of relieving pain—of ſoothing ſorrow—of beſtowing comfort on the wretched lunatic, whoſe eyes ſhe fancied were turned towards her, in ſupplicating earneſtneſs for thoſe alleviations ſhe vainly

ſought

ſought from others, was more powerful in the breaſt of the young devotee, than the influence of ſuperſtitious terrors; and ſhe continued, not only to bring her every refreſhment ſhe could procure, but to attend her with the utmoſt tenderneſs.

The ſuperior, who wanted not good qualities—who governed her nuns with much humanity—and who might, had ſhe been placed in circumſtances more favourable to the expanſion of intellect, and the cultivation of benevolence, have been a valuable member of ſociety, did not oppoſe theſe acts of kindneſs, though ſhe was too much awed by the circumſtances attending her malady, and too much impreſſed by the terror of committing a crime, to authoriſe them.

The fever reached its criſis, and ſome faint recollections of paſt circumſtances mingling with her delirium, ſhe bewailed her fate—appealed to the juſtice of heaven; while ſhe

imprecated its vengeance againſt the hypocrites into whoſe power ſhe was now fallen, in language ſo connected, that it might well paſs for the expreſſions of reaſon, with thoſe unacquainted with the flights of madneſs.

The poor nun liſtened to this rhapſody with amazement and horror; the dreadful impiety of Matilda ſhocked her; and her conſcience, rendered tender by enthuſiaſm, and almoſt wholly ſubſervient to her ſituation, began to be greatly alarmed. Trembling leſt ſhe ſhould have committed an unpardonable offence in conveying a little nouriſhment to the poor wretch who could thus blaſpheme!—She longed for the hour of confeſſion, that ſhe might unburden her full mind.

The terrors of the young noviciate ſpreading through the ſiſterhood, Matilda was again abandoned to ſolitude and miſery. Fortunately, however, the confeſſor, who attended theſe nuns, was leſs a bigot than moſt of his

his tribe. Soured by early misfortune, he had, in the firſt paroxyſms of diſappointment and diſguſt, quitted the world—nor was he convinced of his folly till too late; when wearied of the dull monotony of monaſtic life, and vainly regretting the world he had left, without the power of returning to it again, he endeavoured to find that conſolation in philoſophy and the ſtudy of nature he had ſought in vain in the converſe of his fraternity, whoſe hypocriſy diſguſted, and whoſe ſuperſtition provoked him.

It was to this man the friend of Matilda confeſſed her fault, who, far from condemning her humane conduct, convinced her of the propriety of obeying the dictates of nature; and aſſured her, no ſervice would be more acceptable to her Creator, than acts of mercy; for, however God might ſeem to afflict his creatures, yet as his ways were inſcrutable by mortal eyes, it was the duty of every human being to comfort all in afflic-

tion, whatever their ſtation or character might be.

Intereſted by the tale he had heard, he begged to ſee the invalid; and being fully acquainted with the nature of her diſeaſe, ordered her thoſe nouriſhments he thought moſt likely to promote her recovery. She was now daily provided with dainties from the ſuperior's table, of which, as the violence of her diſorder was ſomewhat abated, ſhe generally ſwallowed a few mouthfuls.

Though Matilda now daily gained ſtrength of body, a fatal apathy ſtill hung over her mind; ſhe no longer raved—no longer exhibited thoſe terrifying ſymptoms of derangement, which had marked the earlier period of her diſtemper, but ſhe ſeemed ſunk in a calm and ſettled melancholy; ſhe paſſed whole days with her head reſting on her hand, and tears ſtreaming from her eyes, awake only to the idea that ſhe was wretched—her faculties were

too

too weak to comprehend the extent of her misery, or form any connected ideas.

In this state of quiescent sorrow she remained some months, obedient to the will of every one who thought it worth while to controul her. Incapable of reflection, she wandered silent and dejected through the vast gardens of the convent, or passed, if she was not led thither, whole days in her cell, absorbed in the painful recollections which rose to confuse and sadden her mind.

Lord Mountshannon, who had sent to enquire after Matilda, heard, with sorrow, of the feeble state of her intellects; it appeared to him so like a judgment, that all the dissipation into which he plunged, could not banish it from his mind; nor could he reflect without remorse on the depth of iniquity, into which, by imperceptible degrees he had fallen. When he first administered the stupifying potion to his wife, his only design by it was to remove her for a short time from

the caſtle, while he frightened Matilda into the propoſed union; but the doſe operating more violently on her conſtitution than he intended, and his daughter's obſtinacy completely counteracting his ſchemes, he had been induced to declare Lady Mountſhannon a lunatic, of which, though he kept her very private, he had many witneſſes. By theſe means he procured himſelf to be appointed guardian to his children; and, obtaining poſſeſſion of their fortunes, relieved his pecuniary embarraſſments, by the ready caſh which had accumulated during their minority; tho' he had found it difficult to obtain legal poſſeſſion of this property—had had Mountford's anxiety to ſatisfy, and the craving curioſity of the world to appeaſe; yet for the preſent he had conquered all theſe obſtacles—had reſtrained the impatience of his ſon, by aſſuring him that his mother, who was ſlowly recovering from a ſevere illneſs, had hitherto, and ſtill continued to occupy ſo much of his ſiſter's time, as to prevent her writing; and the world he had

amuſed

amuſed with the ſtrange ſtory of Matilda's elopement with the Viſcount, who was actually gone to France, where he meant to wait the event, and try if ſhe would prefer him to a convent—not that he felt much regard for her, but that to have the power of humbling her pride and mortifying his rival, was too high a gratification to be eaſily yielded up.

Though his lordſhip was thus delivered from his preſent evils, he dreaded the hour of retribution, and feared the perſons who had power and inclination to call him to account—he trembled at the thought of his ſon's return, and he had little reaſon to think he could amuſe him much longer with his inventions: this, with the horror of his mind, preyed inceſſantly on his health.

Had Matilda been in a ſtate either to receive a huſband or enter on her noviciate it would have relieved him from much embarraſſment, for in the one inſtance, the Viſcount would have ſhared with him the

odium

odium of his paſt tranſactions, and in the other he could declare ſhe had been profeſſed with her free conſent; and as certain intelligence to the contrary, would then be almoſt as impracticable to gain, as it would be uſeleſs when obtained, he could better brave his ſon's reſentment, and the contempt of the few who would think it worth their while to inquire into his villanies.

Her preſent ſituation not only depriving him of this wiſhed for, though poor ſhelter for his vices, but depriving him of it by the very diſorder he had wantonly inflicted on his unſuſpecting wife, tortured his very ſoul, and harraſſed him day and night. Should Matilda be once reſtored to ſoundneſs of mind, he fondly thought he would begin a ſcheme of retribution; yet he neglected to reſtore Lady Mountſhannon to her rights, though he was well aſſured her mind, ſpite of all her afflictions, had long regained its wonted powers; but he vainly endeavoured to perſuade himſelf that motives of tender-

neſs

neſs reſtrained him, becauſe he would not afflict her with the news of her daughter's preſent ſtate.

Matilda, who began ſlowly, and almoſt imperceptibly to regain her ſanity of mind, was, at length, after an interval of four months, perfectly recovered, yet his lordſhip ſtill continued to find ſome plauſible excuſe for the delay of his intended plan of reformation and reſtoration.

Every effort was now uſed by theſe miſtaken zealots to induce her to enter their ſociety. When ſhe was preſent, love and benevolence was the guide of their actions towards each other—peace and harmony prevailed in their minds—every turbulent paſſion ſeemed lulled to reſt—while their lives appeared to glide on in one quiet round of calm content.

Deceived by theſe flattering appearances, had no ſuperior duty called her to the world—

no

no warmer affection lingered in her heart, ſhe might have been induced to repoſe her harraſſed mind in this quiet retreat. But while ignorant of her mother's fate, and fully convinced of the pain ſhe would feel at her loſs; and the agony De Valcourt would endure to know ſhe had abandoned him for ever.—It was impoſſible ſhe could for a moment heſitate, or even think of ſuch a ſacrifice without horror! For though fears of his conſtancy would often riſe—though ſhe could not help thinking, had he loved like her he might ere now have diſcovered and releaſed her. Yet hope, that fond companion of youth, failed not to cheer her with the pleaſing proſpect of many years of happineſs to come.

The benevolent prieſt, to whoſe philoſophic and enlarged mind ſhe had been ſo much indebted during her illneſs, now endeavoured to prevail with her to quit a world, which he repreſented as full of wickedneſs and ſorrow. But his feelings not being in perfect

uniſon

uniſon with his arguments, they appeared to her even more futile than the perſuaſions of the ſiſterhood had done.

She was at length, after a few weeks, informed that letters had been received from her father, who, in leſs than a month would arrive to know her final determination, when ſhe muſt either accept the Viſcount as a huſband, or enter on her noviciate; and every effort to perſuade her to the latter being now redoubled, Matilda began to think of ſome plan to effect her eſcape. She remembered the maxims of her mother, who had often told her, that every difficulty would yield before the exertions of an ardent mind, reſolutely bent to effect any purpoſe it conſidered neceſſary to happineſs; and determined, tho' ſhe knew not in what way her exertions could be uſeful, to employ her time and talents wholly to one grand aim, that of regaining her liberty.

Full of theſe ideas, ſhe watched ſeveral ſucceſſive days the portal of the convent, which, however, being ſo ſtrickly guarded as to preclude all hopes of eſcape, ſhe was obliged to have recourſe to the gardens, as the only place from which ſhe had any proſpect of quitting her priſon, and eluding the vigilance of her jailors; yet, when ſhe gazed on the high walls that ſurrounded them, an involuntary ſigh eſcaped her.—Wandering inceſſantly round theſe extenſive grounds, in the faint hope of finding ſome hole in the wall, ſome broken aperture, or ſome decayed part, whoſe height ſhe might more eaſily climb, ſhe at length diſcovered, through a thick grove of trees, an old arch, whoſe entrance was nearly hid by the ſhrubs that grew thickly round it—ſhe entered the avenue, a long dark narrow paſſage, and having proceeded a conſiderable way without approaching any thing like a termination. "Surely," ſaid ſhe, with renovated ſpirits, "this cavity, which, by ſome unaccountable accident has remained ſo long unno-

noticed by the ſiſterhood, muſt lead beyond the walls of the convent, and I have now found the much deſired means of eſcape."

Fearing, however, ſhe might at this time be miſſed, and fancying ſhe heard the diſtant ſound of the evening bell ſummoning to veſpers, as ſhe had ever conformed to all the ceremonies of the place, ſhe haſtily retreated, reſolving to purſue her ſearch at midnight, when all the nuns were retired, and the houſe huſhed in ſolemn ſilence.

Returning eagerly towards the chapel, fully occupied with the pleaſing diſcovery ſhe fancied ſhe had made, the father that for ſome days had ſupplied the place of her friend, who was prevented by illneſs from attending his duty as confeſſor to the convent, croſſed her path, and darting on her a look both of anger and inquiry, entered the walk ſhe had juſt quitted.

This

This man, though poſſeſſing a high office in the monaſtery, to which he belonged, was both in body and mind, the reverſe of the humble intelligent being, whoſe kindneſs had often ſoothed her ſorrow. He was a ſhort, fat man, whoſe prominant belly, and purple face, beſpoke the luxury in which he indulged; the vicious twinkling of whoſe eye, made modeſty turn from him with diſguſt; this, mingled with his affectation of ſuperior ſanctity, had rendered him an object of averſion to Matilda, who always ſtudiouſly avoided him, and who was peculiarly pained by the rencontre of the preſent moment, eſpecially when ſhe ſaw him take the path ſhe had left, fearing it might lead to a diſcovery, and fruſtrate all her hopes.

Among the boarders of this convent, was an Engliſh lady of rank, who being well acquainted with Matilda's ſtory, from the talkative nuns, who delighted to recount it to their pupils, with many miraculous additions, calculated to impreſs their young minds,

minds, felt deeply intereſted in all her concerns.

Lady Charlotte Howard poſſeſſed a fine underſtanding, and benevolent heart, with a frankneſs of manners and gaiety of diſpoſition, which amuſed and intereſted. Tho' Matilda and this lady, from different circumſtances in their education, and early habits, appeared at firſt ſight, very oppoſite characters, there was yet ſufficient congeniality in their minds to form a laſting friendſhip.

To this lady ſhe had long communicated every feeling of her heart, and to her ſhe now imparted the incident, which awakened her hopes; who, reſolving to ſhare with her friend, the danger of exploring the paſſage, waited impatiently the hour when they might ſafely venture forth.

The moon, which they had watched from its earlieſt riſing, while they liſtened to the laſt

laſt tolling of the convent bell, and heard the ſolemn footſteps of the melancholy ſiſterhood, as they ſlowly retired to their cells, now ſhone bright, and almoſt deadened the faint light of their lamp; gliding ſwiftly along, they ſoon reached the ſpot, which Matilda entered with a light heart, hoping to bid adieu to a place which would be remembered only with pain; but her ſteps were retarded, and a momentary terror ſeized her as ſhe fancied ſhe beheld a figure moving ſwiftly along ſome diſtance before, till her friend, who had not ſeen this appearance, laughing at her fears, they cautiouſly proceeded.

The paſſage, though long and narrow, ſeemed to be the work of art, it was arched, and nothing like decay appearing, Lady Charlotte began to fear this was ſome frequented way, which might lead them into danger, when ſtooping her lamp to obſerve the ground, and diſtinctly tracing foot-ſteps, ſhe was juſt going to alarm her friend, whoſe mind

mind engroſſed by alternate hope and fear, had not regarded theſe appearances, when they were ſuddenly ſtopped ſhort by a door that croſſed their path.

Pauſing with terror, they liſtened for a moment, when the ſounds of mirth reached their ears; it ſeemed the voice of midnight revelry, and Lady Charlotte would have inſtantly retired, but Matilda, who had more at ſtake, and who could not endure to return to her priſon without one effort to be free, earneſtly entreated her to return alone; ſaying, "Do not my dear friend, perſuade me to yield to this ſlight difficulty; this place cannot be any part, either of our own convent, or the neighbouring monaſtery; the ſounds we have juſt heard, ill accord with the ſanctity of the place; no, it muſt be ſome harmleſs beings relaxing, perhaps, from the labors of the day, in innocent mirth; ſcenes of delight ſoften the heart, I will make one effort to intereſt their compaſſion; while you retiring to a little diſtance, may

ſoon

ſoon know the reſult of my application, as I ſhall preſently return to you if unſucceſsful; ſo ſaying, without waiting a reply, ſhe gently pulled the door, which, as it was unfaſtened, ſoon opened; when, what was her ſurpriſe, diſappointment, and terror, to behold the ſame individual prieſt, whoſe manners and appearance had been ſo very repulſive, and whom ſhe had met the preceding evening, ſo *mal apropos*, at the head of a ſmall table, drinking wine, and vociferating like a Bacchanalian; a few men who had laid aſide their monkiſh habits, were ſeated round the board, and ſome nuns, whoſe faces ſhe well remembered, in looſe attire, made up the group; a large lamp which hung from the roof of this ſmall, but not inelegant apartment, directly over the table, enableing her diſtinctly to diſcover the features of thoſe placed at it.

Fearing ſhe was diſcovered, ſhe heſitated what conduct to purſue, but her fears ſoon ſubſided, when ſhe obſerved them continue their

their mirth, and paſs the circling glaſs ſwiftly round; ſhe then gently cloſed the door, and returning to her companion, they proceeded to the houſe, aſtoniſhed by the adventure, and mortified by the diſappointment.

Hopeleſs now of eſcaping by means of any private way, ſhe applied herſelf diligently to remove the bricks of the wall, at certain diſtances, that ſhe might eaſily aſcend; her friend was to procure a rope, which they intended to faſten in the garden, whereby Matilda might let herſelf down on the other ſide; and as ſhe continued to labor every night; her undertaking advanced rapidly, ſhe could now aſcend ſo high as to be able to diſcover the road ſide, and was become, by practice, an expert climber.

Looking forward to the hour with delight, when ſhe ſhould once more be at liberty, every idea of danger was baniſhed from her mind; but Lady Charlotte, who could not

think of the difficulties ſhe would have to encounter in this hazardous enterpriſe, without trembling for the ſafety of her friend, reſolved, if poſſible, either to procure protection for her from the Engliſh Ambaſſador, under whoſe immediate care, ſhe herſelf was placed, or enable her to attempt her elopement with more certainty of ſucceſs.

With this intent ſhe obtained leave to ſpend a few days with her protector, who was then on a viſit to a nobleman in the neighbourhood, when ſhe exerted all her influence to obtain his protection in vain, he was too much a man of the world to embroil himſelf with the church, to gratify the romantic friendſhip of a girl; beſides, he knew Lord Mountſhannon, and had no doubt but part of the tale, at leaſt, was invention.

Matilda, who had waited the return of her friend with the utmoſt expectation, was a little diſappointed to learn ſhe had failed of

ſucceſs.

ſucceſs. This diſappointment, was however compenſated, by the contrivance of Lady Charlotte, who had not only brought the rope, as the laſt reſource, but had procured an Engliſh ſailors' dreſs, as nearly ſuited to the form of Matilda as her eye could direct. With this ſhe flew to her cell the moment the nuns were retired, and uſing every argument in her power to prevail with her to relinquiſh her intended project of aſcending the wall, and induce her to gain the confidence of the nuns by refuſing to admit the Viſcount when he arrived, and ſuffering the preparations for entering on her intended noviciate, quietly to proceed; when ſhe might, without danger, quit the convent on the morning of her purpoſed dedication, in the diſguiſe ſhe had brought, as the buſtle which would then prevail, and the general admiſſion of ſtrangers would render her departure, thus habited, very eaſy: ſhe at length ſucceeded, though not without much oppoſition from her friend, not only from fear leſt the vigilence of the nuns ſhould pre-

vent her executing this ſcheme, but leſt ſhe herſelf, ſuſpected of aiding her elopement, ſhould be expoſed to the whole force of their malice.

Theſe fears being at length conquered by the reaſonings of Lady Charlotte, who had reſided a conſiderable time there; the two friends employed themſelves in burying beneath a ſtone in the cell, this maſculine habit, together with forty pounds, which this amiable girl had procured for the diſtreſſed Matilda.

For the few days that remained, ſhe allowed them to think, though deteſting this forced conſtraint, and the deceit ſhe found herſelf obliged to practice, ſhe was ſeriouſly meditating on the approaching hour, which would ſeparate her from the world, frequently deſiring to be left alone, that ſuch requeſt might not appear ſuſpicious on the anxiouſly expected, yet dreaded, morning.

Matilda

Matilda was now treated with diſtinguiſhed marks of kindneſs, both by the nuns, and the lady abbeſs herſelf; the former pleaſed with any acquiſition to their melancholy ſociety, and the latter, gratified in contemplating her own powers of perſuation, (for to that alone ſhe attributed this wonderful change in her mind) and the dignity her name would receive when handed down to poſterity, as the inſtrument of this miraculous converſion.

Lord Mountſhannon, who had many interviews with his daughter, though he felt the moſt agonizing ſenſation while refuſing her entreaties to be reſtored to the rights of a human being; yet, as he could ſecure a large part of her fortune when ſhe was once profeſſed, and as he had already ſinned beyond the hopes of forgiveneſs, as his character was already blaſted, he could not perſuade himſelf to yield to her deſire.

The Viſcount had called many times at the grate, but was uniformly denied admittance, and he waited the event with ſome anxiety, though he could not believe ſhe would prefer ſecluſion, to a huſband ſo deſirable as himſelf.

The important morning at length arrived, the chapel doors were opened early to admit viſitors, who flocked from all parts to witneſs this pageantry. Matilda deſired to be left alone, and her requeſt being complied with, ſhe ſat waiting with anxious ſolicitude, the moment when her friend, who was watching, ſhould inform her ſhe might go unobſerved to the chapel, where ſhe could eaſily paſs through the throng unknown and unqueſtioned. A full hour, however, paſſed without hearing any thing from Lady Charlotte, and ſhe began to fear her eſcape now would be impoſſible. Often did ſhe wiſh ſhe had purſued her own plan, ſhe ſhould then at this hour, have been far from danger, but to uſeleſs regret ſhe never yielded long,

and

and arming her mind with fortitude to brave the worſt, ſhe reſolved, when brought to the altar, to charge the prieſts on their peril to proceed, and by that means ſave herſelf from making a ſolemn vow ſhe neither could nor would keep.

She had, however, hardly fixed this determination, when her friend entered her cell, bidding her be quick, as the Ambaſſador and his friend were arrived, the lady abbeſs engaged with them, and the nuns all ſafe.

Matilda haſtily dreſſed, and her friend ſlipping the female habiliments ſhe quitted under the looſened ſtone, they glided thro' one of the darkeſt cloiſters, and were in a moment within the crouded chapel. As Matilda looked round on the numerous ſpectators, her heart failed—ſhe trembled, and could ſcarce proceed—till Lady Charlotte encouragingly ſaid, "Fear not, you make

a moſt excellent ſailor in this diſguiſe, I ſhould not myſelf know you; then leading her to the outer door, a tear ſtarted to the eye of each as they looked a laſt farewell, while ſhe quickly proceeded on her way.

CHAP.

CHAP. XII.

Fret not thyſelf, thou glitt'ring child of pride,
That a poor villager inſpires my ſtrain;
With thee let power and pageanty abide,
The gentle Muſes haunt the ſylvan reign;
Where, through wild groves at eve, the lonely ſwain,
Enraptur'd roams to gaze on natures' charms;
They hate the ſenſual, and ſcorn the vain;
The paraſite their influence never warms,
Nor him whoſe ſordid ſoul the love of gold alarms.

BEATTY.

NO ſooner had ſhe cleared the precinct of the convent, than, purſuing by the direction of her friend, a path little frequented, ſhe haſtened forward, aſſuming, as well as ſhe was able, the ſwaggering air ſuited to her appearance, and in little more than half an hour arrived, almoſt breathleſs with haſte

and anxiety, at a ſmall village near three miles diſtant from the place ſhe had left, where a ſervant with a horſe, waited to convey her ſome ſtages farther.

Though Matilda depended much on the alteration a change of dreſs made in her appearance, to ſcreen her from the knowledge of her purſuers, ſhould they even overtake her; yet, judging they would immediately ſeek her at all the ſea-ports in the kingdom, ſhe determined to take a different road, and by laying concealed for ſome time, elude their vigilance, though it was with ſome difficulty ſhe reſtrained her impatience to reach England.

From the ſame prudent caution, ſhe no ſooner arrived at an inn about twelve miles diſtant, than, diſcharging the horſe and guide her friend had procured, after taking a ſlight repaſt, ſhe proceeded again on foot; ſhe had not walked more than half a mile, before ſhe was hailed by a kind of travelling

ſtage

ſtage that was going towards Switzerland. Anxious only to be at a diſtance from the place ſhe had juſt left, ſhe accepted with thankfulneſs, the vacant ſeat, and the vehicle ſlowly proceeded on its way.

Her companions appeared to be of the lower order of traders, who were going on ſchemes of buſineſs; they were, however, cheerful, frank, and obliging, and Matilda thought herſelf happy in being thus ſituated. Yet her mind was too much oppreſſed to partake their mirth, though they endeavoured by every effort to enliven her; till finding all their attempts ineffectual, with a ſhrug and a laugh at the general gravity of her countrymen, they left her at full liberty to indulge her reflections, continuing themſelves to laugh and ſing, without regarding or again attempting to interrupt her. At night they ſtopped at a ſmall auberge, where Matilda, endeavouring to ſuppreſs her fears, and aſſuming all the courage ſhe could muſter, eat a haſty ſupper with her companions,

and retiring to her chamber without any one ſuſpecting ſhe was any other than ſhe appeared; remained unmoleſted till rouſed by the vociferation of the driver, who was ready before day-break, to purſue his journey.

It will be neceſſary now to return to the convent, where Lady Charlotte no ſooner quitted her friend, than haſtening to the apartment of the abbeſs, where ſhe had been ſummoned previous to her attendance on Matilda; ſhe, with her protector, the Ambaſſador, and a large party of noble viſitants, was conducted to a ſeat near the altar.

After waiting a conſiderable time, not wholly without trepidation, the awful ceremony at length commenced; two of the youngeſt nuns were ſent to conduct Matilda in. Surpriſed at not finding her in her cell, they ſought her for ſome time in different parts of the houſe, till tired of their ſearch, they returned to ſay ſhe was no where to be found.

found. This created general conſternation, the doors were inſtantly cloſed, and every part of this vaſt building diligently examined.

Lord Mountſhannon, who could not help thinking this a trick invented to detain her priſoner there, and prevent her giving her hand to the Viſcount, that they might at ſome future period perſuade her to enter their houſe, inſiſted on ſearching all the various receſſes himſelf; and the abbeſs, terrified at the circumſtance, and dreading his power, conſented.

It was late in the evening before he could be convinced his ſuſpicions were groundleſs; and then after diſpatching perſons in various directions, judging ſhe would return directly to England, he ſet out immediately to the neareſt ſea-port, leaving the Viſcount behind to diſpatch any intelligence the perſons who were ſent in ſearch of her, might gain.

Lady

Lady Charlotte, who expected to be watched with an eye of diſtruſt, ſeemed entirely to eſcape obſervation, except from the penetrating eye of the Ambaſſador, who regarded her with ſuſpicion, though he forbore to make any comment, and ſhe endeavoured to preſerve a ſteady countenance, while ſhe ſecretly rejoiced at the delay Lord Mountſhannon himſelf had occaſioned, hopeing her friend would by that time, be beyond the reach of purſuit.

Matilda continued her journey without any material occurrence, through the ſecond day, which was now drawing to a cloſe; the ſun was declining, the calm of evening ſeemed to ſhed a compoſing ſerenity over the landſcape, while the ſoft breeze from the hills, impregnated with the ſweets of ſummer, refreſhed with its coolneſs, and delighted with its fragrance, her ſpirits were calmed; ſhe hailed the bleſſings of liberty; and though ſadneſs filled her mind, it was a ſadneſs unmixed with the rankling cares which had of

late

late disturbed her peace; she thought of her mother with painful anxiety—of De Valcourt, with tender solicitude, while the tear of mingled emotion stole gently down her cheek.

The loaded carriage slowly ascended a hill, and having reached the summit, the tired animals stopping to rest, gave her time to contemplate the surrounding scenery. Looking round she beheld the most beautiful valley she had ever seen, a few cottages, rustic, but neat, were thinly scattered in the vale below, where they were surrounded as far as the eye could trace, by gardens, vineyards, and orchards, while meandering through the midst, a small rivulet ran; the descent from the road was chalky, and almost perpendicular, covered in part with grass, wild flowers, and weeds, growing from the strata of earth impregnated with the chalky substances.

As

As Matilda feared diſcovery moſt in populous towns, and dreaded again to enter a public inn, leaſt ſhe ſhould be ſeen by any of her father's emiſſaries; the thought ſuddenly ſtruck her that ſhe would ſhelter herſelf among theſe peaſants for a few weeks, when ſhe might ſafely take ſhipping for England, and in this obſcure place, it was ſcarce probable ſhe would be ſought. Obſerving at a diſtant part of the road a gentle declivity, ſhe took leave of her companions, and paying the driver liberally for her accommodation, deſcended the hill.

The cottage door ſtood open, and the peaſants, returned from labour, were eating their evening meal. She looked wiſtfully at them, but dreading a refuſal, wanted courage to ſolicit their hoſpitality, or inquire for a lodging; by ſome ſhe was regarded with looks of curioſity as ſhe paſſed, but by moſt ſhe was unnoticed.

The

The landſcape was now faſt fading away, and the diſtant hill but dimly ſeen by the faint light, yet ſhe ſtill lingered irreſolute—ſtill wandered ſlowly on, unable to aſk the ſhelter ſhe wanted, when a young woman, carrying a milk-pail, croſſed from an oppoſite field toward her. Her dreſs was a light green ſtuff—her hair looſely tied behind with a ſmall bow of pink ribbon, while a ſtraw hat faſtened with the ſame colour, half ſhaded a face, which, though lovely, was marked with ſorrow; ſhe walked ſlowly on, ſinging a plaintive ditty, which ſeemed to intereſt her heart, for her voice was often loſt in the anguiſh of her ſtrain.

Matilda firſt ſuffered her to paſs, then taking courage, ſhe haſtily followed, and bowing as ſhe approached; the young peaſant wiped the tear from her eye, when turning on her a face full of intereſting ſweetneſs, and in which diſappointed love had left ſome traces of character, ſhe aſked, in broken Engliſh, if ſhe could ſerve her.

Sur-

Surpriſed at this addreſs from one of her condition, Matilda regarded her for ſome moments in ſilence, and then encouraged by the benevolence of her countenance, ſaid. "Can you inform a ſtranger, a foreigner, of whoſe nation you ſeem to have ſome knowledge, where he may procure a night's lodging?"

"Yes," replied the peaſant, looking earneſtly in her face, "follow me to my father's cottage, which is now within ſight; we have a neat chamber to ſpare, that a countryman of your's lately quitted.—He taught me to liſp his language—and taught me, too, to love his country." A crimſon bluſh now ſuffuſed her cheek, and turning from Matilda, they walked ſilently towards a ſmall houſe, to which ſhe had pointed, while ſhe ſeemed labouring to ſuppreſs ſome painful ideas that roſe in her mind.

They now entered the cottage, and were ſoon ſurrounded by a group of females, who eyed Matilda with pleaſure and admiration; while a venerable old man bade her welcome.

come. She then repeated her tale, that she was a stranger who had been invited thither by the beauty of the scenery, as she viewed it from the road, and wishing to spend a few days in that delightful place, wanted a lodging.

The old man heard her without any mixture of surprise or distrust; and supper being ready, she was invited to share their respast with that unsuspecting hospitality which characterises the village swain, unhackneyed in the arts that disgrace more polished society.

She accepted their invitation with pleasure; and the extreme cleanliness of every thing around, gave a relish to their homely food, while the cheerful simplicity that animated this little society—their efforts to impress her with favourable sentiments of themselves, as well as to render her happy, all conspired to soothe her mind.

During

During the meal ſhe had full leiſure to examine the inmates of this humble and ſequeſtered dwelling: they conſiſted of five females, (of whom, Jannette, the one ſhe had met, was the youngeſt) daughters of the old man, who looked round on his children with delight. They might all have been reckoned handſome by thoſe, with whom tolerable features, aided by a glowing complexion, can compenſate for the want of that expreſſion which a well-informed mind diffuſes over the countenance. But in the faces of theſe women there was no variety, a kind of ruſtic coquetry, and jealous emulation to attract ſeemed the only feelings of which their hearts were ſuſceptible, and the little arts practiſed to effect thoſe ends, the only efforts of which their minds were capable.

Leſs pleaſed with theſe obſervations than ſhe had been on their firſt appearance, ſhe turned from them with diſguſt, to contemplate the intereſting Jannette, whoſe face, ſadneſs, not unmixed with hope, impreſſed.

With

With her ſhe talked, and in her converſe found pleaſure: this rouſed the envy of her ſiſters; and Matilda beheld with pain, the malevolence that animated their conduct towards her; while the old man, who loved to narrate, and who ſeldom met with an auditor to whom his tale was new, having now finiſhed his ſupper, began the hiſtory of the village, and before ſhe was ſhewn to her chamber, acquainted her with every tranſaction that had happened for the paſt twenty years.

The following morning the family went to their occupations in the vineyards, leaving only Jannette at home, whoſe employment it was to manage the domeſtic concerns of the houſe, and who pleaſed with this opportunity of ſpeaking the language ſhe had juſt learned, talking of England, its inhabitants, manners, and cuſtoms, lingered a conſiderable time with Matilda, forgetful of her occupations; while ſhe, charmed with her artleſs, yet ſenſible obſervations, and

happy

happy to behold the gleams of delight, which at times, as they converſed, ſeemed to chaſe from her countenance its habitual melancholy, felt little inclination to quit her abruptly: The employment of the houſe at length forcing her companion away, ſhe was once more left to her reflections.

It had occurred to Matilda, when ſhe quitted the convent, that De Valcourt might ſtill be in Paris, and could ſhe meet him and unite their fates by an indiſſoluble union, ſhe ſhould not only ſecure to herſelf a protector, who would place her beyond the reach of her perſecutors, but ſecure to Lady Mountſhannon a ſon, who from his knowledge of the world, his active ſpirit, and ardent mind, would be well qualified to encounter all the difficulties which might ariſe in procuring her juſtice. Yet, fearing, leſt letters in her own name might lead to a diſcovery, ſhe wrote in a diſguiſed hand, the following note, addreſſed to him at Paris, or to be forwarded immediately if he had left that city.

" As

"A friend of your's, perſecuted and diſtreſſed, entreats your preſence at the village of ———. Your own happineſs is at ſtake, haſten thither, therefore, the moment you receive this!"

For ſome time ſhe debated whether it would be ſafe to write to Mountford, but at length determined to addreſs him in an anonymous letter, begging him to return immediately to the caſtle, and reſcue his oppreſſed family; having no doubt but if he were ſtill at liberty, this, with ſome ſuſpicious circumſtances that muſt have already occurred, would bring him directly to England.

Having finiſhed her two epiſtles, ſhe ſat impatiently waiting the return of Jannette, who was gone out in ſearch of a meſſenger, as the letters muſt be conveyed to ſome public town before they could be put in the way to reach their reſpective places of deſtination. At length, after ſome delay, ſhe appeared,

peared, and informing her ſhe had been unſucceſsful in her enquiries, the peaſants being all engaged in the fields, offered to carry them herſelf to a man who lived about a mile diſtant, and whom ſhe knew would go to market the following morning, when he might forward them.

Thankfully accepting her offer, Matilda haſtily put the letters into her hand—the one to De Valcourt, by accident lay uppermoſt—Jannette looked on the ſuperſcription, and her face became inſtantly ſuffuſed with bluſhes, which were ſoon ſucceeded by a death-like paleneſs. Matilda beheld with emotion this ſudden indiſpoſition; but before ſhe had time to enquire the cauſe, Jannette, agitated and confuſed, hurried out of the houſe.

Left to reflect on this ſtrange circumſtance, ſhe found a new ſource of inquietude. That the emotion ſhe had witneſſed had been created by the addreſs of De Valcourt, was

but

but too evident, and her imagination conjured up a thouſand painful images, while her mind, buſied with conjectures, was reſtleſs and diſturbed. Often did ſhe regret having ſuffered her to depart without making further enquiries; however, as ſhe reſolved to gain every poſſible information at the moment of her return, ſhe endeavoured to compoſe her ſpirits; but the reſt of the family arriving before Jannette, ſhe was compelled, for that evening, to endure the torture of ſuſpence, while ſhe vainly ſought to diſcover in her countenance or manners ſome clue to guide her judgment—this ſimple girl was ſtill the ſame, or if ſhe remarked any difference it was only that ſhe ſeemed to behold her with increaſed pleaſure and mingled curioſity.

Unable to reſt, Matilda ſtood gazing at the moon from her chamber window, as it beamed on the ſcarce moving waters below, long after the village was huſhed in ſilence—long after the gleaming of diſtant tapers had

ceaſed to mark the ſtraggling cottages, till wearied of indulging the painful ſenſations that filled her boſom; yet incapable of ſleep, ſhe turned to a cloſet, where ſhe had before obſerved ſome old books, hoping to find one which might divert her mind from its preſent train of gloomy reflections. She turned over many without ſeeing any thing either to intereſt or amuſe—they conſiſted chiefly of polemical divinity, which had her heart been at eaſe, would ſcarcely have engaged her attention, and was ill calculated to diſſipate her care or draw her thoughts from intereſting objects. Almoſt deſpairing of ſucceſs, ſhe was replacing thoſe ſhe had opened, when one of more modern appearance caught her eye—ſhe took it from the ſhelf, the name of Shakſpeare was on the outſide—this was indeed, ſhe thought a treaſure, as ſhe opened the page, which her eyes ſcarce glanced over before the book dropped from her trembling hand—a faint ſickneſs almoſt overpowered her, as ſhe remained for ſome moments motionleſs with ſurpriſe, jealouſy,

and

and fear. It was the very book in which ſhe had often read with De Valcourt, in the margin of which they had each written their obſervations on the author, while their own affection enabled them to apply ſome of his moſt pathetic deſcriptions, and which he had begged when they parted, to ſoothe the ſolitary hours of abſence.

It was now clear that he was the Engliſhman who had inhabited her preſent apartment; but was he become ſo careleſs of what he once deemed valuable?—was he ſo entirely indifferent to her as to leave the book he had ſolicited with ſuch earneſtneſs, ſo negligently behind?—had he been ſo unconcerned in her fate as to remain for months in this place, occupied only in teaching the ruſtic Jannette, his native language, while ſhe was enduring ſuch accumulated evils?—the conviction was painfully oppreſſive, yet it was too ſtrong even for love to oppoſe, or hope, deluſive hope, to diſſipate.

The emotions of Jannette, too, were now all accounted for; her rapture when ſhe firſt ſpoke of him—the ſorrow that clouded her countenance—the bluſh that ſuffuſed her cheek, were but the varied feelings of love. But could ſhe, lowly and humble as ſhe was, have ventured to raiſe her thoughts ſo high?—could ſhe have foſtered a paſſion ſo ardent as her's appeared, without hope? No; De Valcourt, the inconſtant De Valcourt, had triumphed over the heart of this innocent ruſtic, and had left her to linger out the remainder of life, vainly wiſhing again to behold him, or fruitleſsly regretting that ſhe had ever liſtened to his bewitching voice: Had done this, too, at a moment when ſhe was enduring perſecution for his ſake, and when he muſt have had reaſon to fear for her ſafety, ignorant as he was of her fate.

After a ſleepleſs night, ſhe deſcended to breakfaſt, reſolving to queſtion Jannette: who, again confuſed and heſitating, ſeemed unable to reply, and whoſe anſwers ſerving rather

rather to increaſe, than allay, curioſity, Matilda determined to diſcover her ſex, and ſome part of her ſtory, and obtain, by communicating her own, the ſecret of Jannette.

At length, having imparted a conſiderable portion of her hiſtory (concealing only the names of the parties) to the attentive girl, whoſe countenance, as ſhe related, exhibited emotions of ſurpriſe, joy, and admiration, ſhe took her hand. and cried, "Tell me, I beſeech you, tell me the cauſe of your emotion yeſterday: You have already ſaid this book belonged to your late lodger;" holding up the volume of Shakeſpeare; "ah, was not his name De Valcourt? I ſee," continued ſhe, "by your emotion it was—I ſee, alſo, that you love—perhaps, too, you are beloved by him. Inform me, I pray you, I am deeply intereſted in his fate!" As ſhe uttered this, her voice became almoſt inarticulate with anguiſh.

Jannette raiſed her eyes, where the ſtarting tear ſtood trembling, but remained for ſome moments ſilent. At length, a burſt of ſorrow calmed the contending paſſions of her heart, when, after expreſſing her joy at finding an Engliſh woman to whom ſhe might confide her diſtreſs, ſhe ſaid:

"Think me not, deareſt lady, a guilty creature—ah, do not condemn me for an error into which the nobleſt feelings of my heart has betrayed me. 'Tis true, I love the Marquis De Valcourt—love him beyond the power of a poor untutored girl, like myſelf, to give you even a faint idea of: 'Tis true, alas! too true, that I have not only ſacrificed to him my heart, but"

Matilda now caſt on her a look of reproachful jealouſy, which, for a time, ſuſpended her narrative; till, obſerving the ſorrowful brow, and ſupplicating countenance of the object before her, ſhe checked the angry paſſions that were riſing in her boſom;

boſom; and again kindly taking her hand, bade her proceed, aſſuring her ſhe would find in her a friend, ever ready to pity the faults, and alleviate the ſufferings, without condemning the frailties of her fellow creatures. Soothed by this affectionate addreſs, ſhe again began her artleſs tale.

"Though born and bred in this village, and accuſtomed only to the converſation of my ruſtic equals—though wholly unlearned, and ignorant of more refined pleaſures, accident led me early to form for myſelf a plan of happineſs entirely independent of my ſituation. My mother, whoſe weak ſtate of health, for many years before her death, confined her to the houſe, made me her conſtant companion, when to amuſe her leiſure, ſhe taught me to read; and as ſhe had in her youth ſeen the world, and lived many years a ſervant in Paris, related to me a thouſand little anecdotes, which intereſted and amuſed; and it was one of the firſt pleaſures my infant mind was ſuſceptible of,

to liſten while ſhe told ſome tale of chivalrous valour, or diſaſtrous love. When ſhe was not inclined to gratify my curioſity, I read ſome of the books preſented every year, after the vintage, by the lord of this village, to the daughters of the moſt active cottagers.

"By this means, I acquired a taſte for improvement, and, as my underſtanding ripened, I felt a ſtill ſtronger wiſh to obtain knowledge. Every little preſent I received —every recompence given me for induſtry or exertion, I carefully hoarded to gratify my ardent deſire to gain information; and, forgetful of every childiſh amuſement, confined myſelf wholly to this one favourite purſuit. Without a guide to direct my choice, the books I bought were generally thoſe addreſſed to the feelings, and I have ſat many a long ſummer's evening, diſſolved in the luxury of imagined woe—have followed two lovers through difficulties and diſtreſſes—have witneſſed their conſtancy, till my mind, acquiring a degree of fancied heroiſm,

heroiſm, I have almoſt envied them even their ſorrows, and wiſhed to partake their diſtreſſes. Yet theſe books, though they made me romantic, and rendered me diſſatisfied with my lot, inculcated the love of morality, and inſpired me with a wiſh to become as virtuous as the heroines I read of, though I deſpaired of ever being ſo great; and I performed the duties of my ſtation with an ardour that ſecured me the reſpect of all our neighbours, while the poliſh my manners gained by this kind of reading, ſoon rendered me an object of admiration even to our ruſtic ſwains, who were pleaſed without being conſcious of what created their delight; and as it was the wiſh of almoſt every fond mother to ſee me united to her ſon, I was ſoon addreſſed by many of our village beaus. But my taſte was too much refined to be pleaſed with their rude courtſhip, and awkward gallantry. I turned from them with diſguſt. Wholly ignorant of the ſubjects on which my imagination delighted to dwell, and on which I longed to find ſome

one with whom I might converſe, they could hardly comprehend my ideas; while their tokens of affection—the ſimple preſents of ribbons, gloves, and toys, with which they ſought to win my love, excited only my diſdain: Yet, I wiſhed to yield my heart to the enchanting joys with which my fancy was filled, and ſighed to find ſome perſon whoſe feelings were congenial to my own; in whoſe breaſt I could pour my little ſtock of knowledge, and from whom I could receive endleſs inſtruction.

"The many pretenders to my love, though they could awaken no affection in my boſom, kindled the ſparks of envy in my ſiſters, and I ſoon became the object of their hatred. In vain I exerted every effort to ſoothe and oblige; they regarded me with jealouſy; every ſiſterly affection was fled, and I was compelled to endure all the mortifications malice could invent. I had nothing to ſoothe me under their vexatious tyranny but the warm affection of my father, whoſe

whoſe love remained unabated, ſpite of the tales to my diſadvantage with which they ſtrove to poiſon his mind, for my mother had long ſince been numbered with the dead. Yet I was wretched, and my books were almoſt my only ſource of conſolation, though, as I had nothing to oppoſe to their malice, but increaſed efforts to oblige: I had ſometimes the ſatisfaction to ſee their envy diſarmed by my kindneſs, and a tranſient return of affection animate their hearts towards me.

In this way did I paſs ſome years of my life, ſtill increaſing the romantic turn of my mind, without improving my judgment, or exerciſing my reaſoning faculties, when, about the beginning of laſt February, the Marquis De Valcourt arrived to paſs a few weeks here, for the recovery of his health. His countenance was pale and languid; yet it exactly anſwered my ideas of maſculine beauty: He ſeemed like a hero of romance, and the melancholy which ſometimes clouded

his countenance, and depreſſed the natural vivacity of his manners, rendered him ſtill more intereſting to me. But my hopes, vain as they were, did not once aſpire to him; and I fondly perſuaded myſelf that I contemplated him as a being raiſed above the common level; as a model of perfection that I might venerate and eſteem, rather than a creature whom I ſhould ever dare to love.

"As he ſeemed unhappy, I exerted all my efforts to ſoothe and comfort him; he ſoon began to appear cheered by my attentions, and pleaſed with my ſociety; he would liſten while I talked on ſubjects intereſting to my feelings, and to which I had never before found any one who was inclined to attend, would correct my judgment, and inform my mind; and partly by praiſes ſoothing to my pride, and partly by cenſures which were calculated to gratify even while they humbled, led me to reflect on my paſt conduct; convinced me I was not ſo free from error,

with

with all my aſpirations after perfection, as my vanity had led me to think. Yet he admired my taſte, wondered at the improvement of my mind, and the cultivation of my talents, and ſoon obtained my confidence. I could eaſily communicate to him all the feelings of my heart; he ſeemed pleaſed to obſerve its workings, while he ſedulouſly improved my underſtanding;—taught me to ſpeak his native language;—would often read to me paſſages from favorite authors; continually giving me ſome new ideas of the wonders, learning and ſcience had brought to light, till a new ſource of delight and admiration opened to my view.

In his ſhort abſences I dwelt upon his inſtructions with rapture, and my nights were paſſed in contemplating his wiſdom; in imprinting his leſſons on my mind; but I knew not; alas! I was imbibing a poiſon fatal to my repoſe.

Aſtoniſhed

Aſtoniſhed at the progreſs I made, he began to regard me with more than common intereſt, as the creature of his own forming; his voice was ſoftened when he converſed with me; he would ſometimes exclaim, "Charming creature, what pity it is thy life ſhould linger in obſcurity; how much doſt thou reſemble my Matilda: but I cannot oppoſe the prejudices of the world, and I will not injure thee, then preſſing my hand to his lips, he would hurry in diſorder from me.

Though this language ſoon removed the veil from my own eyes, ſoon convinced me how dear he was to me, yet ſo ſtrong was my reliance on his honor, that I had no deſire to avoid him; I was content to be unhappy, but could not endure to be ſo wretched as the loſs of his ſociety would make me. I was too little verſed in the arts of deception, to conceal a paſſion ardent as mine, from the penetrating eye of the Marquis, who ſoon ventured to talk of love: yet let

let me not accuſe him: let me do juſtice to his ſincerity, he never deceived me by falſe promiſes of marriage—never impoſed on my credulity—but aſſured of my affection, he endeavoured to draw my reaſon to the ſide of my inclination; and found the taſk, I fear, but too eaſy to convince me I ſhould be juſtified in the ſight of heaven, in becoming his wife without the ceremony; while the prejudices of mankind, and the ſeverity of an auſtere father, who would condemn a marriage he would think degrading, muſt for a time prevent him beſtowing on me a title my perſonal merit deſerved, and which he ſhould glory in conferring; ſhould feel happy was he in a ſituation to draw worth from the obſcurity in which fortune had placed it.

"Though I loved with tenderneſs, with fervor, yet I heſitated to comply: I had much to loſe, I could not bear the frowns of offended chaſtity—could not endure to be driven from ſociety—to be pointed at as an object of contempt;—I had not yet learned to brave cenſure or ſupport ſhame. While I thus

I thus debated, he prepared to depart, but with increaſed dejection of ſpirits; declaring, ſince I could ſacrifice no prejudice to enſure his felicity, he muſt quit for ever an object ſo dangerous to his peace.

" My boſom was rent with anguiſh at the thought of parting; I could not ſupport the idea of eternal ſeparation; every other evil ſeemed light in compariſon of that, and I yielded to his wiſhes.

" For ſome months we lived happily together, till he received letters which greatly affected his mind, though he refuſed to communicate to me their contents; this pained me ſeverely, and ſoon after others arriving, which he ſaid were ſummonſes to attend his father, with threats if he refuſed to comply.

I entreated him, though my heart was rent with anguiſh, to leave me, as I would not

not injure him with his friends; and he prepared to depart, though with evident reluctance. Before he quitted me I received the moſt ſolemn aſſurance from him, that he would return in the courſe of a month, and carry me with him to England; or if he were prevented, find ſome means of informing me how I might follow him, for we agreed that to correſpond, would create ſuſpicion, and perhaps lead to a diſcovery of our connection before he could convey me from hence.

Left to painful ſolitude, I had leiſure to reflect on my imprudence; I had read of forſaken damſels, and falſe Knights, yet I could not ſuſpect my De Valcourt of treachery, till the fatal month elapſed without tidings, another yet ſucceeded, and my ſpirits ſunk; but I was not entirely without hope; accidents might prevent, he might be ſo cloſely watched, he could neither come or ſend. Judge then with what delight I firſt met you, your dreſs proclaimed you Engliſh, and I fondly fancied you were ſome meſſen-

ger

ger from my love, my huſband. Though diſappointed in that expectation, it was ſome conſolation to converſe with you of a land I loved, and yet hoped to viſit, to ſpeak in a language too in which it was my ardent wiſh to improve; and when I found you knew the Marquis, my hopes were all awakened, I expected to hear tidings of him at leaſt. Yet I feared your queſtions, and dreaded leaſt I ſhould injure him, but after the confidence you repoſed in me, and the intereſt you took in him, I could not refuſe to acquaint you with my hiſtory; beſides, to obtain your friendſhip, would be ſo deſirable, and you encouragingly ſaid you would not condemn. Ah! madam, you have now heard a faithful recital of my folly, but do not deprive me of your counſel, affection, and protection; — indeed — indeed I will be only the wife of De Valcourt, and ſhould he prove inconſtant, ſhut myſelf up in a convent, devoting my life to penitence and prayer.—And, oh! let me not ſuppli-

cate

cate in vain for what information you can give me concerning him."

Oppreſſed with anguiſh of heart, Matilda had no power to reply; ſhe knew the tale he had told this innocent girl, was meant to betray, and the whole of his conduct ſeemed ſuch a ſettled plan to ſeduce; her heart recoiled at his baſeneſs; ſhe, however, aſſumed courage enough to aſſure Jannette of her friendſhip and protection; telling her ſhe knew not if the Marquis were ſtill in France, but would inform her the moment an anſwer to her letter arrived; "Then," added ſhe, in a faultering voice, "there is only one thing in your tale that ſupriſes me, was you never jealous of the Matilda of whom he ſpoke with ſo much delight?"

"Oh yes," replied Jannette, "but he quieted my fears by aſſuring me ſhe had rejected with her own lips, and in the moſt poſitive manner, his love.

Shocked

Shocked at this new inſtance of his deceit, ſhe felt unable to remain longer in her preſence, and was glad of the arrival of the family, to excuſe herſelf for the reſt of the day, and retire to her apartment to calm the agitation of her mind, and reflect, if poſſible, what courſe ſhe ought to purſue.

A tumult of corroding paſſions now ſwelled her breaſt, while its fluttering inmate ſtruggled to be free. That De Valcourt could be the betrayer of innocence, had once appeared to her impoſſible; but the proofs of his guilt were now ſo ſtrong, ſhe could not doubt, neither could ſhe find one palliative circumſtance to plead in his favor; it was deliberate, ſettled, ſeduction. The more ſhe reflected, the keener was her anguiſh, life had now loſt every charm; tired of the inceſſant ſtruggle, exiſtence ſeemed not worth preſerving; this laſt ſtroke deprived her of fortitude, her mind was confuſed, a train of dreadful ideas ſucceeded one another in her diſturbed imagination. To return

turn to the parlour again was impoſſible, yet to keep the hapleſs, the confiding Jannette, ignorant of the painful truth ſhe had to communicate, was ungenerous, and ſhe made an effort to forget her own woes, while ſhe wrote the intelligence that was to baniſh hope.

CHAP. XI.

As well the derviſe in the deſert hid,
Should raſhly hope, dare he preſume to bid
The boiſt'rous Ganges turn aſide its courſe;
The Nile's vaſt cataracts ſtop their tumbling force;
Rude Aboulfaken ſmile a flowery plain;
Or blood like Arva, draw a ſilvery train;
In other ſpheres as well might planets move,
As Shadir purpoſe to forget his love.

IT was in vain ſhe endeavoured to methodize her ideas—in vain ſhe tried to give ſome diſtinct account of De Valcourt, her confuſed powers were inadequate to the taſk, and it was not till after many efforts, ſhe produced the following note:—

"How will thy heart be wounded, unhappy Jannette, by the intelligence that wrings my

my own, to communicate—I cannot repreſs my feelings—my hand trembles—I ſhudder as I write—that De Valcourt is a villain ;—he is the individual whom I preſerved from death—the fondly beloved—the betrothed of Matilda—yet the huſband of another!—But I could ſoon remove this wretched being out of your way ;—who, alas! has no longer any reliſh for life—whoſe mind ſinks under theſe repeated tortures—this inceſſant ſtruggle againſt cruelty and oppreſſion ;—but he will not even then be juſt to you—he has no father to controul him — and cannot have been called from you for the purpoſe he aſſerts: yet ſhould he even now have abandoned you, do not, dear Jannette, ceaſe to reverence yourſelf—let not the ſcorns of an unfeeling world ſink you into vice—the little ſtock of wealth I poſſeſs, ſhall be yours, uſe it as the means to place you in ſome ſituation of honeſt independence ; ſhould you find it neceſſary to quit your preſent aſylum, and if you ever ſee De Valcourt again, tell him he has deſtroyed Matilda, who with her laſt breath

entreats

entreats him to preſerve you from infamy.—Farewell—I go to execute my half-formed purpoſe, if it fail not—farewell—for ever,

MATILDA."

Shuddering at her own thoughts as ſhe folded the paper—and is De Valcourt loſt—for ever loſt, ſhe cried, am I then left to contend alone againſt a father's violence—no one to aid me in procuring juſtice for—or contributing to the comfort of a mother, who made the early hours of life ſo happy, ſo ſupremely bleſſed—no, I am wholly abandoned—perhaps too, my mother, who alone occupies my care—alone binds me to life—has long ago fallen a victim to tyranny;—or even if ſhe has not, how can my weak powers reſtore her to liberty, to reaſon—no, it is a vain expectation, and I ſhall never ſee her more—why then ſhould I continue to preſerve a miſerable exiſtence.

Thus hurried on by deſpair, the uniform principles of her mind had no longer any force,

force, while she deliberated on annihilation through the few remaining hours of day. The shades of evening now clouding the valley, she stole from the cottage unperceived; a kind of fixed horror that benumbed her faculties, had succeeded to the violence of her first emotions, she sat down by the side of the rivulet, still meditating on self-murder; but some latent sparks of hope—some indistinct ideas of the criminality—the folly of the action made her yet linger. The deeper tints of night, at length blackened the landscape; the harmless cottagers were all retired to rest; a solemn stillness reigned around, when hastily forming a resolution which despair alone could dictate, she walked a few paces from the water to plunge with greater force into the stream, but she was again recalled to recollection by the distant howling of a dog, and as its sound echoed through the silence of night, it seemed to her disordered mind, to say, "Hold, rash wretch!" she paused for a moment, while horror chilled her blood—when Jan-

nette, ſcreaming with terror, folded her to her boſom.

"Great God! and am I juſt arrived in time to ſave you, Matilda—deareſt Matilda;" cried ſhe, "I have but now miſſed you, and read your cruel note, which half informed me of your purpoſe.—Ah! could you think ſo meanly of me, as to ſuppoſe I would, even if I could, purchaſe happineſs by your deſtruction!—No, no, I will never think of De Valcourt more—he cannot be mine; he never intended to be mine: return, therefore, I beſeech you, return and be comforted; there are, perhaps, many years of happineſs in ſtore for you; and from you I expect to learn fortitude to bear my own wretched lot."

Soothed by the tender friendſhip of this artleſs girl, and aſhamed of her own deſperation; cold, trembling, and oppreſſed, ſhe ſunk for a while on her boſom, and then ſilently following, they entered the cottage together.

The

The fears that agitated the boſom of Jannette, on reading Matilda's incoherent note, and which for a time ſuſpended the keen ſenſe of her own ſorrows, were not yet ſubſided; and it was, for this night, her turn to comfort and ſooth; ſhe prevailed with her to take a few mouthfulls of food, and ſwallow ſome wine, and when at a late hour they ſeparated, Matilda found her mind ſoftened by the endearments of friendſhip; her diſtreſs had no longer the fierceneſs of deſpair; ſhe could weep for her loſs; the powers of reaſon were again reſtored.

And ſhall I, ſaid ſhe, when left to reflect, ſhrink becauſe De Valcourt is a villain? Shall I, who have duties to perform—that have a mother moſt tenderly beloved, who calls for my exertions—who may at this moment be weeping the uncertainty of my fate—who may yet, even by my weak efforts, be reſtored to happineſs—may certainly be be ſoothed by my attentions, deſert myſelf! Perhaps too I may be called on to ſhelter the

wretched victim of his treachery from the cruel taunts of the world, and by affording her protection, ſhield her from that ſtate of depravity to which the injuſtice of mankind would force her, abandoned as ſhe is by the man on whom ſhe has placed her confidence. Shall I with all theſe motives for life, with all theſe things required at my hands, dare to ruſh into the preſence of a juſt and benevolent God?—I have been ſaved once from the dreadful deed by thy interpoſition, O merciful Creator! when I had fondly fancied the ſuggeſtions of deſpair, the language of reaſon; forgive me, gracious God, and teach me in future, reſignation to thy will.

Calmed by theſe reflections, her mind, before morning, gained a degree of heroiſm which enabled her to look on the paſt with compoſure, and to the future with hope; while ſhe vainly endeavoured to forget the amiable, the intereſting, De Valcourt, and remember him only as the betrayer of Jannette; but, alas! the wound was too deep

to

to be ever healed; every ſhrub, every flower, reminded her of him, virtuous as ſhe once thought him.

The reflections of the night had operated very differently on the mind of Jannette, who awakened from her delirium of happineſs, now felt the full force of her wretchedneſs; and it was with difficulty Matilda could chaſe from her boſom, deſpair, by raiſing freſh hopes, rouſing her to a ſenſe of duty, and calling forth the feelings of a mother towards her unborn infant; and theſe exertions, while they ſoothed the heart of Jannette, prevented her own woes from cankering on her mind. She now made her acquainted with every particular in her own hiſtory, offering to take her to England, aſſuring her of ſupport and protection; declaring ſhe ſhould ſhare with her every comfort ſhe could procure.

This offer Jannette gladly accepted, and the two friends now ſpent almoſt their whole

time together, losing the keen sense of their own sorrows in the wish each felt to soothe the affliction of the other.

While Jannette was busied with domestic duties, Matilda would often take her solitary walk through the ripening vineyards, exerting all her reasoning powers to fortify her mind, and anxiously endeavouring to banish De Valcourt from her memory, but found his image, alas! more deeply impressed by every effort to forget him.

A fortnight at length elapsed, and Matilda thinking she might now travel with little fear of discovery, was anxious to be gone: while Jannette, who since the intelligence so fatal to her peace had rendered her incapable of transacting the affairs of the family with her usual punctuality, endured not only the harsh treatment of her sisters, but the reproaches of her father, was no less desirous to quit a place filled only with painful remembrances of past happiness. Yet

she

ſhe could not think without ſorrow and compunction, on the anguiſh her father would ſuffer at her unexpected elopement, and Matilda, who pitied and reſpected him, would gladly have alleviated his ſufferings, could ſhe have diſcovered to him her ſex and name without endangering herſelf. Reſolving, however, to ſend him a faithful account before they embarked for England, ſhe readily entered into a plan of Jannette's forming, for their departure, who dreaded more than death, the ſevere diſpleaſure of her father, the proud taunts of her more chaſte neighbours, and the haughty triumph of her envious ſiſters.

Some hours before Matilda ſet out, Jannette obtained permiſſion to ſpend a few days with a relation, ſix or ſeven miles diſtant from her home, where ſhe was to wait her arrival; and the coach being now come, Matilda took a haſty leave of the family, and departed; while, as ſhe ſlowly aſcended the ſummit of the hill, a thouſand painful reflec-

tions crouded to diſturb her peace, and ſhake her newly acquired fortitude. When laſt ſhe looked from that ſpot, amidſt all the tumults of her mind, ſhe had thought of De Valcourt with delight—had gloried in his love—had fondly pleaſed herſelf with recounting to him all the difficulties ſhe had ſtruggled with—and been ſoothed by his fancied approbation;—but, ah! how dreadful was the reverſe ſhe had to ſuſtain!

Convinced, however, that theſe thoughts, if indulged, would unfit her for the performance of thoſe duties ſhe determined to fulfil, ſhe ordered the man to drive with all poſſible expedition, promiſing a reward when they reached the end of their journey.

The motion of the carriage now ſeemed to whirl her from the keen recollection of her preſent wretchedneſs, and in a ſhort time, meeting Jannette, they proceeded without interruption or accident, and at the end of the ſecond day, reached a ſea-port, whence

whence a veſſel was going in a few hours to ſail for England.

In her ſailor's dreſs ſhe bargained with the maſter for the paſſage of two females, to whoſe care ſhe committed them, and then after changing her cloaths for ſome already provided, and writing a letter to the old cottager, which ſhe hoped would reach him almoſt as ſoon as his daughter's abſence would be known, they went on board.

As the wind was briſk, Jannette, who ſoon felt the effects of the element, was exceedingly ſea ſick; and Matilda, though leſs affected than on her firſt voyage, was not wholly free from indiſpoſition, but a few hours reſtoring her to perfect health, ſhe continued to walk the deck, anxiouſly watching for the Engliſh coaſt, and was greatly rejoiced on the morning of the third day to behold its chalky cliffs. She found, however, as they drew near the ſhore, that as it was low water they could not land, and had the mortifica-

tion to hear they would caſt anchor till the next tide.

Unwilling to bear this tedious delay, ſhe eagerly enquired if there were any poſſible means of getting on ſhore, and being informed ſhe could have a boat, ſhe deſired one might inſtantly be hailed. The boat ſoon arrived, and Matilda, unable to ſuppreſs her impatience, was haſtening down the veſſel's ſide, when the boatman obſerving her earneſtneſs, and knowing it was two female paſſengers he was going to land, demanded five guineas for his boat. She heſitated; the little ſtock Lady Charlotte had provided her with, was now much reduced; it was uncertain when ſhe could obtain a freſh ſupply, and this muſt till then not only anſwer her own wants but thoſe of Jannette alſo; beſides, ignorant as ſhe was of the world, ſhe could not but be conſcious of the very groſs impoſition of this demand.

The

The captain of the veſſel, an open hearted ſailor, now deſired her to return, aſſuring her, as the day was calm, there would ſoon be many applications from the ſhore to land the paſſengers; for accuſtomed as he was to the conduct of theſe men, he had been aſtoniſhed at the effrontry of this demand. A ſcene of confuſion now enſued; the man ſwearing he would be paid for his labour, and the captain as reſolutely declaring he ſhould neither land a ſingle thing from the veſſel, or receive a ſix-pence for his preſent trouble.

Though vexed at the delay, and agitated by the dreadful imprecations vociferated from each party, ſhe was yet too much alarmed to truſt herſelf to the mercy of a man ſo unprincipled as this, and reſolving to wait ſome more favourable opportunity, ſhe led Jannette, pale and trembling to their little cabin, where they mutually endeavoured to ſupport the ſpirits of each other.

The uproar on the deck ſoon ceaſed, when the captain deſcended to aſſure them he had diſmiſſed the man, and that ſeveral boats were now making towards them; one of which ſoon reaching the veſſel, they were ſeated in it, and without farther accident or delay were rowed to ſhore.

The man hawled his boat on the ſands, where ſome officious attendants waited to conduct them to the beſt Inn—recommend the ſafeſt travelling horſes, with a variety of other conveniencies of little conſequence to our travellers. But ſcarce had Matilda riſen from her ſeat before her ears were ſaluted by the oaths of the boatman who had juſt been driven from the veſſel without his expected gains, and who had placed himſelf cloſe to the boat they were now in, pouring out a torrent of vulgar abuſe.

Jumping haſtily on the ſands, ſhe was proceeding along to avoid this diſagreeable rencontre, when her ſteps were arreſted by a violent

violent ſhriek—it was the voice of Jannette, who preparing to follow her, had, by a ſudden motion given to the boat by the diſappointed man, been plunged into the ſea. The water, however, being ſhallow, ſhe was immediately taken up, without ſuſtaining any other injury than completely wetting her cloaths, and was ſoon able to walk to the neareſt Inn, where ſome refreſhment was directly ordered; for Matilda determined to go forward to Mountford caſtle with all poſſible expedition, hoping ſhe might there gain ſome intelligence intereſting to her, or at leaſt be in the way of meeting her brother on his arrival.

It was her intention to paſs through London, where ſhe meant to ſolicit the protection and counſel of Sir Charles Ormond, ſhould he be in England, remembering with a ſigh of regret, he was now the only friend on whom ſhe could rely; having, therefore, ordered a conveyance to be ready in half an hour, ſhe diſpatched a ſhort note to the Baronet,

ronet, while Jannette changed her drenched cloaths, when they ſat down to their haſty meal.

Matilda obſerved with anxiety, the pale face of her companion, and vainly preſſed her to eat a few mouthfulls—ſhe could not ſwallow even a little wine, and her pains ſoon became too violent to be longer endured in ſilence. The fatigue ſhe had undergone ſince ſhe quitted her father's cottage, together with the diſtreſs of her mind, and her late accident had brought on premature labour, and it was now impoſſible for her to proceed. Medical aid being ſoon procured, ſhe continued to ſupport her pangs without a groan, and her only ſolicitude ſeemed leaſt Matilda ſhould quit her chamber. Impreſſed with the painful idea of her preſent forlorn, deſerted ſituation, and dreading to be left by her only friend, to the mercy of ſtrangers, ſhe graſped her hand, beſeeching her with the moſt earneſt ſupplication, not to leave her.

Op-

Oppreſſed by feelings the moſt painful, Matilda watched by her bed-ſide through the long night. This alone ſeemed wanting to fill the meaſure of her diſtreſs, and early in the morning Jannette was delivered of a boy, who, notwithſtanding the inauſpicious manner of its birth, ſeemed though ſmall, a healthy infant. It was ſoon wrapped in the cloaths which the humanity of ſtrangers readily ſupplied; and Matilda, as ſhe preſſed it to her boſom, fancied ſhe could trace the image of De Valcourt in its yet unformed features, while a tear of love and regret dropped on its face, till ſelfiſh feelings for a moment prevailing, ſhe could no longer endure to look on a child ſhe had no intereſt in—ſhe was not its mother, and had loſt its father for ever. Yet to forget him, ſhe felt was impoſſible!

Though embarraſſed by the queſtions curioſity induced the numerous females, which the occaſion had drawn together, to aſk; as ſhe could not diſcloſe the truth—ſhe reſolved

to

to be wholly ſilent. Conſcious as ſhe was, that the imagination is always inclined to chuſe the worſt ſide, where any myſtery prevails, which the inquiſitive mind cannot diſcover, ſhe choſe rather to bear the opprobrium with which, left to form their own conjectures on the ſubject, they might load herſelf and the ſuffering Jannette, than avail herſelf of falſehood.

As the morning was fine, and the infant with its mother fallen into a gentle ſlumber, ſhe walked forth to try if the beauties of nature, which had ſo often filled her boſom with delight, could now tranquillize her ſpirits. Reflecting with anguiſh on the paſt, and looking to the future with trembling ſolicitude, ſhe ſlowly proceeded; one moment aſtoniſhed at the fortitude ſhe had been able on many occaſions to exert; the next, condemning her own weakneſs; now reproaching herſelf that ſhe did not immediately apply to the laws of her country, againſt the violence of her father. Then, again dread-

ing

ing thoſe extremities—and anxious, tenderly anxious as ſhe was for her mother's ſafety, ſhe yet found herſelf incapable of determining what courſe to purſue. While De Valcourt's image, loſt, corrupted, and degraded as he was, ſtill preſſed forward to thicken the gloom which ſhaded her mind.

Oppreſſed by theſe painful reveries, ſhe arrived before the gates of a large manſion, the peculiar ſituation and deſolate appearance of which, arreſted her attention. It was built on the ſummit of a gentle riſing, and ſtood aloft in gothic grandeur, from the humbler dwellings ſcattered around. It was incloſed by a wall, broken and decayed like the building, through which you might diſcover an extenſive garden, over-run with weeds, where here and there a flower would lift its head, as if to bid defiance to the ſurrounding deſolation. The upper caſements were all cloſed, while only a faint ſmoke, which iſſued from one of the chimnies, and an apartment with grated windows, where the light

light was admitted, relieved its deſerted appearance, and indicated that it was yet inhabited by any thing human.

Fatigued with her walk, ſhe ſat down on the graſs to contemplate this object of human inſtability. Perhaps, thought ſhe, as her eye fixed on the building, Mountford caſtle, once the ſeat of joy and happineſs, is at this moment thus deſolate and deſerted; perhaps, too, the owner of this manſion, is now like me, a fugitive wanderer.

Juſt then, ſome children coming along, induced by curioſity, or rather ſympathy, ſhe called to aſk them to whom the houſe belonged.

"To a great lord," replied one of the foremoſt of the girls, courtſeying with much humility, "Lord—Lord—I forgot his name, but my brother Bobby, there, can tell you, ma'am." A boy ſomewhat bigger than herſelf, now advanced, and with an air of conſcious

ſcious ſuperiority, ſaid, "It is the ſeat of the Earl Mountſhannon."

"Is it poſſible?" cried ſhe, ſtarting from her ſeat, while her heart throbbed with emotion, "do you know him—does he often reſide here—is he now in this part of the country?" ſhe repeated, with eagerneſs that ſcarce allowed her time to breathe.

"No," returned he, looking ſignificantly, as if conſcious of knowing more than he choſe to expreſs, "I have never ſeen him, though I know he has been here, but it is a long time ago; and I fancy he is not very likely to come now."

"Why ſo?" replied ſhe, endeavouring to ſuppreſs her agitation, and appear indifferent, while ſhe queſtioned.

"Becauſe, ma'am," ſaid he, (pleaſed with the importance her enquiries ſeemed to give him, and lowering his voice, as if fearful the wind ſhould betray the ſecret he was going to communicate, and which he had been often told he was never to mention,) "becauſe they ſay his Lady is here; and every body

in

in the country knows he never liked her; beſides, ſhe is melancholy mad, and is not a fit companion for a fine Lord, as old Tom, who attends her, repeated to my mother, only yeſterday.

Surpriſe, joy, and anguiſh for ſome moments deprived her of utterance. She leaned againſt a tree, ſcarce crediting what ſhe heard, and almoſt unconſcious of exiſtence, till gaining courage to make further enquiries, ſhe again raiſed her head; but her little informer, frightened at the emotion his narration had cauſed, and dreading the puniſhment he ſhould incur for his diſobedience, ſhould it be diſcovered that he had told the ſecret, had haſtily ran acroſs the meadow, and was nearly out of ſight.

Vexed and diſappointed, ſhe was going to apply to the only means that now ſeemed left to obtain information; to ring at the gate and demand admittance to Lady Mountſhannon. Her heart fluttered as ſhe approached the

the houſe; the thought of being ſo near her mother, created a thouſand mixed ſenſations in her boſom; her hand was already lifted to the bell, when a ſudden reflection ſtayed her—am I not, thought ſhe, as ſhe pauſed, riſking every thing by this precipitance; no doubt but thoſe who guard my mother, will prevent my entrance—will deny me the ſight of her—while by thus diſcovering my knowledge of her retreat, I ſhall hazard her being inſtantly removed out of my way for ever.

Convinced of the imprudence of her firſt intention, ſhe turned ſorrowfully from the ſpot, revolving in her mind what courſe ſhe ſhould now purſue; and though eaſed of ſome anxiety by this unexpected diſcovery, yet pained at the cruel information that her mother was ſtill in a deranged ſtate. But ſhe had not proceeded far on her way towards the inn, before ſhe was accoſted in a liſping voice, of which ſhe had ſome faint recollection, by the name of Lady Matilda; fearing

fearing at the preſent moment to be known, ſhe muffled her face in her cloak, and was haſtening forward, when ſhe was detained by the feeble graſp of a child, which clung to her garment, and whom ſhe inſtantly recogniſed to be the child of her nurſe, Mary; the very infant whoſe education had in happier hours been to her a ſource of delight. This afforded her much pleaſure; ſhe preſſed the child to her boſom, while it beſtowed on her the ardent careſſes of infantine ſincerity; ſaying, "Where have you been all this long—long time; my mother has often cried about you ſince you went, though ſhe has had a great deal of diſtreſs herſelf; but I muſt not tell you who has been ſo cruel to us, becauſe you will be very angry with me, for you know you muſt love your father, though he is ever ſo naughty to us poor people."

Smiling at the child's ſimplicity, that revealed with the ſame breath, the truth it profeſſed to conceal. She eagerly enquired where

where her mother now lived, and following to a ſmall houſe within ſight, to which ſhe pointed, was welcomed by this faithful domeſtic with tears of delight.

From her ſhe received a confirmation of the intelligence that her mother was confined in the great houſe as a lunatic, though it was believed by ſome of the moſt intelligent of the neighbourhood, that madneſs was merely a plea of which his Lordſhip availed himſelf, to obtain poſſeſſion of her property; and this ſuſpicion, which had been firſt created by the communications of one of the attendants, while in a ſtate of intoxication, was ſtill kept up by his anſwers to the enquiries which curioſity now prompted them to make.

After giving this intereſting information, ſhe began a hiſtory of her own ſufferings.—"Ah, madam!" ſaid ſhe," I ſoon found a change in my affairs after you left the country; 'tis true, I angered his Lordſhip before

before I was turned from the farm, for I could not, to be ſure, believe the report he ſpread in the village, that you had run off with that Viſcount, for I knew you hated him, and told my neighbours I was ſure you had been ſecretly conveyed away by my Lord, your father."

Poor Mary had continued for ſome time to pour her tedious narrative into the dull ear of Matilda, who occupied by her own intereſting concerns, knew no more of the tale ſhe was reciting, than what told her ſhe had ſuffered for her ſake; when ſhe was interrupted by the entrance of a man whom Matilda inſtantly remembered to be the corrupt ſervant of Sir Charles, to whom ſhe had entruſted her letter when confined at the caſtle; ſtarting at his approach, a mixture of aſtoniſhment and indignation animated her countenance; while on his, pleaſure, ſurpriſe, and conſcious integrity, were viſible. Bowing reſpectfully, he ſaid, "I do not wonder, madam, at the ſeverity of your looks;

looks; judging from appearances, you no doubt condemn me as guilty of treachery; but if you will condeſcend to liſten to my apology, I ſhall, I am ſure, ſtand acquitted.

"On the night you gave me this letter," continued he, pulling a paper from a ſmall drawer in the room, "which I have carefully preſerved, I muſt have been cloſely watched, for my conference under your window was obſerved; and before I had proceeded many paces from it, your father met me, and inſtead of ſending me on the intended commiſſion, diſmiſſed me his ſervice. He hurried me through the outward gate, without permitting me to return to the caſtle, and I was deprived of all opportunity of acquainting you with my ſituation.

"Often as I walked towards the village did I condemn my own imprudence, which, by riſking too much, had loſt me the only opportunity of ſerving you, when I might, had I gone without ſeeing you, have return-

ed with ſatisfactory intelligence. In this frame of mind I arrived at Mary's cottage, determined to adviſe with her what ſteps I ought now to take, hoping that we might together think of ſome plan by which I might render myſelf uſeful.

" I found her with a ſleeping infant in her arms, weeping over the changes that had taken place at the caſtle: Though I was wholly unknown to her, ſhe received me with a frankneſs that encouraged my addreſs; but when I opened my buſineſs—ſhewed her your note to me, and expreſſed my wiſh to ſerve you, that frankneſs was changed into rapture. We conſulted for ſome time how that beſt might be done, and then judging ſome perſon would ſoon be ſent on the errand, intended for me, by her directions I placed myſelf at the end of the path leading to the two great roads, where I could not only diſcern any who came from the caſtle, but obſerve what road they might take.

" I had

"I had not been in my hiding place above half an hour, before I ſaw two men from the caſtle galloping towards me; I crept cloſe, fearing to be diſcovered, yet determined not to loſe ſight of them, when they paſſed by me without obſerving my ſituation, and took the road to London. I then, as Mary and myſelf had before determined, diſguiſed as I was, procured a horſe at the village, and following the travellers, I ſoon came within ſight of them, when, keeping at a convenient diſtance, I could eaſily diſcern, by the light of the moon, which ſhone full on his face, that one of them was Lord Mountſhannon; who, after accompanying the ſervant ſome miles, returned, and again paſſed me without obſervation, though I trembled leſt a glimpſe of my muffled face ſhould attract his attention.

"At the next ſtage I overtook his meſſenger, whom I ſtudiouſly avoided, while I continued to follow him, ſtopping where he ſtopped, and changing my horſe where he

changed his, till we arrived within a few miles of London, where your mother then was.

"You are, doubtleſs, at a loſs to conjecture by what means I obtained money for this expedition; but I had been liberally ſupplied by my generous maſter, Sir Charles, who, on the morning he went away, calling me into his dreſſing-room, ſaid, "As I have once tempted you to an act of treachery, John, for which I am not aſhamed to own I am heartily ſorry; and as your ſituation here may not, perhaps, be pleaſant to your feelings, and you may want, when I am gone, the means to procure yourſelf a change, I ſhall leave with you this fifty pounds; not that I doubt either the generoſity or kindneſs of Lady Mountſhannon, but, circumſtances may ariſe, under which it would be painful to make application to her, and I feel myſelf intereſted to preſerve you from every future temptation to vice."

"The

"The following evening Lady Mountſhannon with her retinue ſet out for this place: they travelled through bye roads with great privacy, the windows of the coach being always cloſely ſhut, and a ſervant ſent before to appriſe the people where they intended to ſtop, that a lady of conſiderable rank, deranged in her intellects, would ſoon be there; and deſiring them to keep out of the way, for fear the ſight of ſtrangers ſhould irritate her diſorder, aſſuring them at the ſame time, ſhe was ſo carefully guarded, it would be impoſſible for her to do any miſchief. This preventing both the intruſions of curioſity and the officious attentions of zeal, they paſſed quietly along, and I followed, endeavouring, to no purpoſe, to gain a ſight of my miſtreſs, and convey your letter, madam, till we arrived here, where I waited ſome days, but without even a hope of effecting my purpoſe, ſo cloſely was ſhe guarded, ſo completely was all acceſs to her prevented.

" Tired of lingering here, I once more returned to the neighbourhood of the caſtle, hoping ſome opportunity might occur of conveying to you the only information I had been able to gain; but as my buſineſs no longer required diſpatch, I walked back, truſting to the chances of procuring ſometimes a ſhort ride on the road.

" This delayed my return ſome time, when what was my ſurpriſe and grief to find the caſtle deſerted—the ſervants all diſcharged—Mary turned out of her houſe by his lordſhip—and the ſtrange tale every where told, though no where believed, that you, madam, were married to the Viſcount Mandeville, and gone to ſpend the ſpring in France.

" After many days enquiry, I found Mary and her children ſheltered in a little hut, almoſt in want of the neceſſaries of life. The man who had the care of the caſtle and eſtate having found it impoſſible to ſilence her obſervations on the late incidents, and thinking, no doubt, by that ſeverity to deter others

from

from making their remarks with the ſame freedom, ſeized her little ſtock for arrears of rent, and ſhe was left wholly deſtitute of the means of procuring ſubſiſtence for herſelf and family.

" I had before admired her, and pity now operating on my mind, I entreated her to relieve her preſent diſtreſs, and ſecure protection to her children, by ſharing my little fortune. After repeatedly urging my requeſt, ſhe accepted my offers, and we were united. I then purchaſed, with the little remains of my wealth, enough to ſtock a ſmall farm, which we procured ſome miles diſtant from her former dwelling.

" No ſooner were we ſettled in our new abode than I wrote to my former maſter an account of all the occurrences at the caſtle after his departure, thinking he might find you in France, if it was true that you were there, and waited a conſiderable time, anxiouſly expecting intelligence from him; but

no news arriving, we began to deſpair, when about two months ago I received this letter, (putting into her hand a paper, which ſhe haſtily opened, and read read as follows :)

" Honest Fellow,

" I thank you moſt cordially for the intereſt you take in my concerns, and your generous care for the dear young lady, and happy ſhould I have been had your intelligence reached me ſooner ; for your letter has travelled over half the continent ; but no matter, we muſt now be diligent. I wiſh you, therefore, to remove immediately to the place where you firſt left Lady Mountſhannon confined, ſending me word immediately if ſhe is ſtill there, while you remain to obſerve what is doing. I ſhall enquire for Matilda at every convent before I return ; for the ſtory of her marriage is falſe. I have found Mandeville, and had not his cowardice prevented, ſhould ere now have made his life pay the forfeit of his crimes.—Farewell, your friend, Ormond."

" When

When Matilda had finiſhed, the man continued, "You will readily believe, madam, that we did not heſitate to obey theſe commands: having little to ſettle, we ſoon arrived here, and I have ſince ſent my maſter conſtant intelligence, from whom, ſome nights ago, we received another letter, which cheered our ſpirits; it informed us that he had reaſon to believe you had eſcaped your enemies, though the circumſtances which led him to hope ſo, were too long and intricate to detail: he ordered us to watch every veſſel that arrived, as you would probably be ſoon in England, where he meant to return in a few days, having only one concern that could now detain him."

Surpriſed and pleaſed at the ſtrength of underſtanding this man's recital diſcovered; rejoiced too at having found a friend ſo devoted to her intereſt, ſo well qualified to give her counſel, at a moment when ſhe thought herſelf wholly deſtitute of ſupport. Matilda thanked him moſt fervently for his

firm friendſhip; and then giving a brief account of every thing that had happened to her ſince ſhe was forced from her home, entreated he would adviſe her how to proceed in the preſent ſtate of her affairs, adding, that her own wiſh was to go directly to London, and apply to the laws for redreſs.

After pauſing a few moments, he perſuaded her to wait the arrival of Sir Charles, and not venture alone and unprotected, as ſhe then was to appeal to the law, as it was at beſt but a ſlow remedy; and ſhe might before ſhe could gain any legal protection from it, be again hurried out of the kingdom, and her mother removed beyond the reach of all future enquiries. Beſides, madam, there is another circumſtance, added he, which I forgot to mention ſooner, that will probably have ſome weight with you; your brother is in England, he left this place about a fortnight ago, with the deſign of gaining intelligence of your father, and means,

means, I know, to return before the arrival of Sir Charles.

Convinced by his arguments, and reſolving to wait a few days, ſhe returned to the inn with a heart much lighter than when ſhe left it; revolving in her mind, as ſhe joyfully tripped along, the beneficial effects of lenity towards the faults of others, exemplified in the ſteady friendſhip of John to herſelf; her hopes were re-animated, ſhe could think of her father with leſs diſguſt, as he too might one day ſee his errors, and be inclined to make ample retribution; ſhe even wiſhed to find ſome motive to forgive De Valcourt, though he had deprived her of happineſs, and though ſhe reflected with pain on the activity of Sir Charles for her ſervice, contraſted with his more than ſupineneſs and neglect.

On her arrival ſhe found Jannette in tears at her long abſence, who not having been able to gain any other intelligence from her

attendants, than that ſhe was gone out, was ſinking under the weight of her own apprehenſions, but Matilda re-animated her drooping ſpirits with repeated aſſurances never to leave her again without acquainting her with it. She then cautiouſly communicated to her, in part, the intelligence ſhe had juſt received, and Jannette became compoſed, rejoicing to find, though they had been detained there by an accident ſhe once thought ſo unfortunate, that their ſtay was likely to prove ſo beneficial to her friend.

Matilda continued for ſeveral days conſtantly in the chamber of Jannette, having little inclination to quit it; ſhe amuſed herſelf with watching the glow of health again enlivening her cheek, and gazing on the little infant, while the recollection of its father filled her with inquietude.

As it had been ſeveral times hinted to her by the good people of the inn, that ſhe ought

to

to have the child baptized, ſhe applied to the miniſter of the pariſh, and the mother having no objection, chriſtened it in the proteſtant faith, to ſecure to it all the privileges of conformity, naming it Horatio De Valcourt, after its father.

Though Jannette made ſome ſlight oppoſition to this, ſhe was evidently pleaſed, and ſeemed to preſs the babe with more fervor to her breaſt, ſince it bore the name as well as reſemblance of the man ſhe could not but adore, betrayed and deſerted as ſhe was.

Matilda, whoſe health began already to feel the effect of confinement, one evening after Jannette, who had been up moſt part of the day, was retired, once more ſtrolled out to enjoy the refreſhing breezes from the ſea: ſhe had been ſurpriſed at the uncommon civility ſhewn her, for ſome time paſt, by the hoſt and hoſteſs, and was now ſtill more aſtoniſhed to find herſelf, as ſhe

iſſued

iſſued from the inn yard, the object of general attention; the children followed her, and as ſhe paſſed the cottages, the peaſants came eagerly to their doors to pay their reſpects to her.

Oppreſſed by theſe circumſtances, ſhe haſtened to the fields, but even there ſhe was not free from obſervation, the labourers returning from work, ſtopped to gaze on her.

For Mary, who came conſtantly backwards and forwards to the inn, to bring intelligence of every veſſel that was ſeen from the ſhore, hearing from the good-natured matrons, ſome reflections which, without conſidering, tended to aſperſe the character of her miſtreſs, could not reſiſt the triumph of telling them that Matilda was a great lady, whom ſhe had nurſed, and who was more famed for the benevolence of her heart, and the ſweetneſs of her manners, than even for her birth or fortune; without conſider-

ing

ing what injury her incautious exultation might do Matilda; and this was what had raiſed the general curioſity, and created that additional reſpect in the landlord and his wife.

As her walk was now rendered uncomfortable, ſhe returned much ſooner than ſhe intended; it was ſtill light as ſhe reached the door of the inn, when a coach and four drove up; all was now confuſion and buſtle—the landlady rang her bell—the waiters from all parts of the houſe came running to the gates, while "Oſtler! Oſtler!" was echoed thro' the yard. Without lifting up her eyes, ſhe paſſed the carriage, and hurrying along, had reached the firſt flight of ſtairs leading to her apartment, when one of the gentlemen ruſhing from the chaiſe, regardleſs of the many witneſſes that ſurrounded him, cried in a voice ſhe immediately knew to be De Valcourt's, "Am I again ſo happy as to behold you, long loſt, lamented Matilda!"

when

when folding her in his arms, she gazed fondly on him for a moment, and then oppressed by contending passions, sunk senseless, while he pressed the cold cheek which rested on his bosom, without at first perceiving her situation.

CHAP.

CHAP. XVI.

In her the painter might anatomize
Time's ruin, beauties' wreck, and grim care's reign:
Her cheeks with chaps and wrinkles were diſguis'd;
Of what ſhe was no ſemblance did remain;
Her blue blood chang'd to black, in every vein;
Wanting the ſprings that thoſe ſhrunk pipes had fed,
Shew'd life impriſon'd in a body dead.

SHAKSPEARE.

NO ſooner did De Valcourt obſerve the diſorder of Matilda, than bearing her to the neareſt apartment, he eagerly applied every remedy to reſtore her to recollection: bending over her with tender ſolicitude, he had ſoon the pleaſure to behold returning life again animate her cheek; but what was the ſurpriſe, anguiſh, and horror, depicted on his

his countenance, when with a ſtern look, and determined accent, ſhe bade him quit her for ever! and no longer practice on her credulity—for his baſeneſs was diſcovered—his treachery known.

Unable to comprehend the meaning of this anger, or the accuſation with which he was charged, he entreated to know how he had offended—what he had done to create her diſpleaſure; and why, after the tedious abſence and cruel ſuſpence he had endured, he was to be baniſhed from her ſight on the firſt moment of their meeting!

Provoked at his hypocriſy and effrontery, and incapable, from agitation of ſpirits, longer to ſupport this converſation, ſhe bade him in a yet more determined tone, to leave her for the preſent; adding, "When I am compoſed, I will ſee you once more, in the feeble hope that I may recall you to a ſenſe of juſtice."

He

He now retired with a countenance ſo full of diſtreſs, that had ſhe not been convinced of his guilt, would have pierced her heart; but conſidering it as an effort to excite her pity, and the effect of long practtiſed diſſimulation, it rouſed her anger, and enabled her the ſooner to ſubdue thoſe tender ſentiments the ſight of him had excited.

After about half an hour ſpent in reflection, her mind recovered a little compoſure, and willing to diſmiſs at once every thought of De Valcourt, that ſhe might be at liberty to fulfil the important duties which at this time preſſed upon her, ſhe ſat down, and after many efforts, produced the following note:—

"De Valcourt, I have loved you with an affection ſo ſtrong, that I frankly own your perfidy will cloud my future days with ſorrow; and it is with anguiſh almoſt inſupportable, I remember we are ſeparated for ever! for I bluſh not to acknowledge the ardor of my love; while I thought you worthy

thy my eſteem, no power on earth could have deprived you of my affection. I expected not that you ſhould be free from errors, while combatting the temptations of the world; but yours is a crime againſt humanity. When you practiſed on the unſuſpecting heart of Jannette, did no remembrance of me ariſe, to check your purſuit; but you have not loved like me, or you would have been ſaved from this vice. We are differently organized, I feel we are, and perhaps it is well we are diſunited; this, however, is not to my purpoſe—I will have done—I meant not to upbraid—I wrote only to inform you that you are a father—to bid you look on your helpleſs child—to call upon your juſtice—to claim your protection for its infant weakneſs. I have many duties to perform, my mind requires all its ſtrength to act in the preſent criſis of my affairs; and I cannot bear the conflicts which the ſight of you create, while the tenderneſs of my heart remains unſubdued; if, therefore, you wiſh to know more of Jannette—if we are

to

to meet again, it muſt be this night—I will endeavour to be collected; and conſcious of what I am now acquainted with, you will not I truſt, again inſult, with profeſſions of your love, one who once proudly ſigned herſelf

Your MATILDA."

She had but juſt diſpatched her meſſenger with this, when one was brought from De Valcourt; its contents, which ſhe read with indignation and wonder, were as follows:

"I am unwilling, deareſt Matilda, to think you capricious, or acknowledge you unjuſt; yet to what but caprice can I impute your late conduct! Great God! what have I done! I know not wherein I have offended—unleſs it be offence to waſte the tedious night in ſighs for you; to cheriſh diſtraction through the day; to ſhun ſociety, and ſicken at the voice of mirth. But I will be calm—will yet hope that ſome miſrepreſentation

ſentation, fatal to our peace, has poiſoned your mind and eſtranged your affections, which a ſimple recital of facts may reſtore.

Surpriſed at miſſing your letters, I haſtened to England, fearing I was again the dupe of ſome artifice; and Beaumont, though his concerns were yet unſettled, yielded to my impatience, and accompanied my return. But you, even you, can form only a faint idea of my grief, horror, and ſurpriſe, when I found the caſtle cloſe ſhut—received the fatal news of your mother's frenzy—and the ſtill more harrowing intelligence of your being the wife of Mandeville. I will not attempt to deſcribe the agony of that moment; I cannot even think of it without horror.

"Beaumont attempted to aſſuage the anguiſh of my mind, and ſo far at length ſucceeded as to convince my reaſon that the whole tale was improbable, and therefore unfounded; yet, even then, ſomething dreadful muſt

have

have befallen you; and my heart ſickened to reflect on the miſeries you were perhaps enduring. In vain I enquired in the village; no one could give me information; Duncan was gone I knew not whither; our friend the ſurgeon, knew only from report, the fatal events that had taken place; Mary was at that time confined to her bed, and the huſband ſhe had married eyed me with ſuſpicion, refuſing to anſwer my queſtions, and either affected to be, or really was, ignorant of your ſituation.

"Diſtracted with fears, my mind was confuſed, I knew not what courſe to purſue, nor which way to trace you. Beaument, though he felt for my ſufferings, was more collected than myſelf, and I ſubmitted to his cooler judgment, when he adviſed me to get my title acknowledged, as I had now ſufficient proofs of my identity, and then boldly claim you of your father. I could ill brook this delay, yet as I ſaw no reſource, I went immediately to court, where as my friend had, without

my

my knowledge, not only procured by his influence the acknowledgment of my title from ſome of the firſt noblemen in France, but even from the King himſelf, I was received as the Marquis De Valcourt; though for the loſs of my property, which now ſcarce occupied a thought, as it had paſſed into other hands, I had no redreſs.

No ſooner had I ſubmitted to theſe formalities, than I haſtened to your father, acquainted him with our loves, pleaded the ſtrong tie of affection that united us, and in the humbleſt manner entreated him to beſtow you on me, and crown our happineſs. He heard me with politeneſs, expreſſed his ſorrow that it was not in his power to oblige me, as you were already married; and in this tale he perſiſted; when, finding every effort to prevail with him to give me any other information, ineffectual, I quitted him in diſguſt, reſolving to diſcover Mandeville; as purſuit, by keeping hope alive, was now the only means left to ſave me from deſpair.

I re-

I returned to France, where my friend kindly accompanied me; I had there, however, the mortification to follow Mandeville from town to town, without overtaking him. Unſucceſsful in this purſuit, I haſtened to the Spaniſh court, where I hoped to gain ſome intelligence from your brother, but he too was returned to England. I then meaſured back my long journey, again viſited Mountford caſtle, which was ſtill deſolated and deſerted; again waited on your father, who is now languiſhing under a ſevere illneſs, and who was incapable of ſeeing me. Wearied by theſe fruitleſs efforts to diſcover you, I was yielding to deſpair, when your note, which has followed me from France, and which through all the diſguiſe you affected, I knew to be yours, arrived, and once more ſet my ſpirits in motion. I was flying to your reſcue, when we this night met. Beaumont, is now with me, he has ſupported me with his friendſhip, his counſel, his fortune, and he alone has witneſſed my ſorrow, my

diſtraction, and can bear teſtimony to the truth of your

DE VALCOURT.

Pauſing for a moment on this well invented tale, and ſhuddering at the depravity to which the practice of deceit will ſink the human heart; ſhe was ſurpriſed by the entrance of De Valcourt, who glowing with anger, cried, as he held up the paper ſhe had juſt ſent him, "Tell me Matilda, tell me what foe to my peace, has wrought on your credulity; what is the tale that has rouſed your anger, created your ſuſpicion! where is the perſon to whom you allude!— of what does ſhe accuſe me! confront me with her, for I know not — by heavens I know not a human being who bears the name you mention; nor has my heart known a ſenſation of love, but for you, ſince the firſt hour that we met; and you cannot, ſurely you cannot think me baſe enough to betray innocence, without even the plea of ungovernable paſſion to plead in extenuation of my

my crime. For God's ſake tell me all you know of this affair, keep me no longer in ſuſpence ;—I am on the rack—let me know the whole, that I may diſcover the villanous calumniator !"

The energy of De Valcourt's language, the agitation of his manners, the diſtreſs viſible on his countenance, almoſt convinced Matilda of his truth ; at leaſt, made her doubt what a moment before appeared ſo incontrovertible. His preſent conduct could not be the effect of deceit ; yet if ſhe acquitted him, what was Jannette.

Puzzled as ſhe was, with vague conjectures, ſhe gave him a faithful account of her whole acquaintance with this girl ; of every thing that had induced her to condemn him.

Suppreſſing his ſurpriſe, he heard her to an end, and then with a frankneſs which carried conviction ſtill more forcibly to her

mind, acknowledged the circumſtances to be ſtrange—beyond his own power to develope, and ſuch as he could not wonder at, or blame her crediting. Yet, aſſuring her ſhe was impoſed on by an artful woman; though by whom that woman had been employed or for what purpoſe he could not imagine, it was a myſtery he had no clue to diſcover.

Strange as all this appeared, Matilda could hardly doubt his innocence; yet the candour and ſimplicity of Jannette ſeemed to be the offspring of truth and ſincerity; but yielding to the warm entreaties of De Valcourt, and the ſtill more earneſt pleadings of her own heart in his favour, ſhe was about to reſtore him to her confidence, when recollecting the volume of Shakſpere, and ſhuddering at this ſtrong proof, ſhe cried, taking the book from her pocket, "This cannot be the work of an enemy; look at this evidence againſt you, found in the poſſeſſion of Jannette, and be ſilent."

Taking

Taking it eagerly from her hand, he regarded it for ſome time with aſtoniſhment, when recovering his ſurpriſe, he ſaid, in a firm tone, "I do not wonder that this ſhould ſtrengthen your conviction; be aſſured, however, you are yet deceived, though ſome deep plot has been laid. This book I loſt ſoon after my firſt arrival in France; how it has fallen into the hands of this infamous woman, I know not; but I will no longer ſupport this ſtate of ſuſpence, ſhe is in this houſe, and I will ſee her inſtantly; ſhe cannot have the effrontery to perſiſt in this curſed falſehood to my face. Lead the way, Matilda, and I ſhall ſoon convince you of your De Valcourt's truth."

Seizing her hand, he was hurrying out of the room, when ſhe made a gentle effort to reſtrain his impetuoſity. "Stay," cried ſhe, "I conjure you to ſtay.—Remember the preſent ſituation of the unhappy woman—the ſudden ſurpriſe of your appearance might be death to her; whatever her faults may be, however cruel her plot to deſtroy our peace,

yet let us not violate the dictates of humanity, or do a deed we may afterwards think of with horror. Believe me, I am full as anxious to clear this myſtery as you can be; for O what a fund of happineſs will, by the developement be for ever loſt or reſtored to me; wait only till the morning, and by that time I will prepare her to receive you."

De Valcourt conſented; but unable to enjoy the converſation of Matilda, while any ſuſpicion lurked on her mind, he retired; when ſhe haſtened to the chamber of Jannette, fully prepared to execute her painful commiſſion, and inform her of his arrival.—She found her in a ſound ſleep; as ſhe approached the bed, her arm, which already embraced her infant, preſſed it cloſer to her boſom, while a ſerene ſmile irradiated her face. "And can this countenance," ſaid ſhe, as ſhe ſtood contemplating her features, "be the index of a mind debaſed by treachery and deceit? Yet if ſhe is innocent, what then is De Valcourt?"

In-

Incapable of reſt, Matilda watched in the chamber, anxiouſly wiſhing her to wake, but unwilling to diſturb this ſweet repoſe, which laſted, with only ſome ſlight interruption, through the night.

The day at length broke; ſhe beheld the riſing ſun glittering over the undulating waves of the ocean; and ſaw the early labourer, as he ſlowly proceeded to his daily toil; heard the ſhrill lark aſcending to her aërial heights, and the ſoft melody of all the feathered choir, when tempted by the opening beauties of the morn, ſhe deſcended to take a ſhort turn through the ripening corn fields, to recruit her ſpirits, and enable her to fulfil her irktome taſk.

The doors were juſt unbolted, and the drowſy ſervants of the inn, ſcarce rouſed from their ſhort ſlumbers, were with tardy ſteps and yawning geſtures ſlowly removing the relicks of the paſt evening's debauch, as ſhe paſſed through the long paſſage to the

court yard, where a panting courſer, breathleſs with ſpeed, which at that moment entered, arreſted her attention; and as ſhe ſtopped to look with pity on the tired animal, Mountford, her long loſt Mountford, ſprung from his back.

Though much improved in manly beauty by an abſence of near eight months, ſhe immediately recogniſed the well-known features, and flying eagerly to his embrace, a thouſand nameleſs tender endearments paſſed, till a ſudden recollection damped Matilda's delight. "O Mountford!" cried ſhe, as ſhe ſunk on his boſom, while the falling tear aſſuaged the anguiſh of her heart, "what a ſituation is ours; how is every enjoyment embittered by the remembrance of my mother's fate!"

"Melancholy, indeed, it has been," returned he, "but allay your grief, my ſiſter, it is now paſſed; her intellects have been long reſtored; and I am come to bring her liberty and happineſs. The ſtory of my father's depra-

depravity is long and painful; and while I tremble to think of the injuſtice my mother has ſuffered, I will not wound your breaſt by the recital, nor indulge at preſent my own curioſity, by any queſtions of your ſufferings, and eſcape; but briefly acquaint you with the circumſtances that have led to our preſent happy meeting.

"Diſſatisfied with the excuſes I from time to time received for your ſilence, and fully determined to relieve the anxiety which preyed on my mind, about two months ago, reſiſting both the ridicule and perſuaſion of Lord Ormond, I quitted the court of Madrid, and arrived in England a few weeks ſince. The caſtle, you may be ſure, was the firſt place to which I reſorted; and you can well imagine the ſurpriſe and anguiſh I felt to hear there reports ſo different from thoſe with which I had been amuſed.

"With a mind tortured by grief, apprehenſion, and anger, I flew to demand an ex-

planation of my father, who was then ſlowly recovering from a ſevere fever, and to whom, after ſome delay and much difficulty, I gained admiſſion. The diſorder had left him extremely weak; and his mind more than partaking the weakneſs of his body, he received me with penitential tears—entreated my forgiveneſs—reprobated his own crimes in language ſo humble, and with ſuch apparent anguiſh of heart, as excited my compaſſion. During the paroxyſms of the diſeaſe, the religious principles his mind had early imbibed returned with full force, though in the ſeaſon of health they had been wholly eradicated, or at leaſt ſo entirely ſuſpended as to give him little check. Fearing he ſhould die, and willing to ſecure happineſs in the next world, he ſent for a prieſt, confeſſed his ſins, and received from him abſolution, on condition of his making reſtitution; which, as the danger was not yet over, and as the ſight of me awakened freſh conviction, he ſeemed willing to do.

" Though

"Though I liſtened with horror to his relation, and with agony to his aſſurances that he knew not what was become of you, yet I readily promiſed to bury the paſt in oblivion, and never enquire into the ſums he confeſſed to have expended from our fortunes, if he would inſtantly give me the power to releaſe my mother from confinement, and ſupply me with the means of ſearching you on the continent. To this he conſented; but before he could acquaint me with the place of her retreat, the agitation his mind ſuffered during this converſation overpowered him, and he fell into a ſwoon, which brought on a ſlight relapſe. For ſeveral days I was obliged to reſtrain my impatience, as it would have endangered his life to have cauſed any irritation on his mind at that criſis.

"After he again recovered, he created many delays; fearing to depend on my word, he endeavoured to bind me to it by written promiſes and ſolemn oaths; and it was not till yeſterday afternoon that I obtained full

power to releaſe my mother, when I inſtantly ſet out."

As it was yet too early to demand admittance to Lady Mountſhannon, Matilda, after giving Mountford a faint ſketch of her adventures ſince they had parted, returned to the chamber of Jannette, who was now completely awake, and with much caution, and many preparatory introductions, told her of De Valcourt's arrival, and his poſitive and continued aſſertions that he had no knowledge of her, had never even ſeen her.

Though ſhe ſeemed greatly ſhocked by this intelligence, and regarded her infant with more than uſual anxiety, as if fearing it might one day reproach her with giving it ſuch a father; yet, with the boldneſs of innocence, ſhe deſired inſtantly to ſee him; and Matilda, finding her ſpirits calm amidſt all the anguiſh ſhe ſuffered, went haſtily and led him in.

Jan-

Jannette then raiſing her eyes, fixed them for a moment on him, when uttering a loud ſhriek, ſhe ſunk on the boſom of her friend. Shocked at this ſight, he retired to the farther end of the room; and Jannette ſoon recovering the powers of ſpeech, cried, with energetic anguiſh, "This is not my De Valcourt—this is not the father of my babe; he is right, I have never ſeen him till this moment."

Matilda, from whoſe boſom a load of anxiety was now removed, endeavoured to comfort and ſoothe Jannette, cheering her with the hope that ſhe might ſtill be happy with the man of her affection, who was, perhaps, a being deſerving of her love; aſſuring her ſhe would uſe her utmoſt endeavours to diſcover him. And De Valcourt, though the myſtery was thickened, though he could no way account for the ſtrange combination of circumſtances, yet he wholly acquitted Jannette of deceit; and won by the enchant-

ing

ing ſimplicity of her manners, felt a ſtrong intereſt in her concerns.

It was now time to go to the place of Lady Mountſhannon's confinement; and Mountford, accompanied by De Valcourt and his friend, ſet out; but fearing the ſight of Matilda, without preparation, might affect her mother ſo deeply as to injure her health, ſhe reluctantly remained with Jannette.

They entered the houſe; to which an order from Lord Mountſhannon gained them admittance, when bidding the ſervant ſhew them to his miſtreſs, he with a ſullen air aſcended a narrow ſtaircaſe, and entering an inner chamber, (of which he kept the key) whoſe lofty windows ſcarce admitted the light of day, and whoſe thick grating of maſſy iron ſeemed to bid defiance to every human effort, they beheld Lady Mountſhannon ſitting penſively in one corner; but ſo altered, "ſo woe-

worn

worn were her looks," even Mountford could ſcarce recognize the once familiar features of his mother.

In a ſtate of inſenſibility, almoſt equal to that in which ſhe left the caſtle, Lady Mountſhannon had been brought into this chamber; and ſo ſtrong were the effects of the ſtupifying potions ſhe had taken, ſo much had they benumbed her faculties, it was ſome weeks before her ſenſes were reſtored; and when recollection returned, the terrible fears which filled her fancy, the agonizing reflections and deep diſtreſs which clouded her mind, made her appear ſtill frantic to the ignorant attendants his Lordſhip had placed about her, and thus aided his deception.

The earneſtneſs with which ſhe ſtrove to convince them of the ſoundneſs of her intellects, and the unjuſt rigour with which ſhe was treated, ſerved but the more to fix in their minds the certainty of her delirium; till

till overcome with theſe repeated and ineffectual ſtruggles, her ſpirits ſunk; a ſlow fever ſeized her, which cloſe confinement increaſed; and a total languor ſucceeding to this, ſhe had been for ſome time regardleſs of every thing about her, ſunk in apathy and deſpair.

The man who attended her, wanted not common ſagacity, and had for ſome time diſcovered, ſpite of every perplexing circumſtance, the clearneſs of her reaſon, tho' he had not relaxed the rigour of his treatment, as he made his Lordſhip pay dearly for his ſilence; and this created the ſullen anger which diſplayed itſelf in his countenance, when Mountford and De Valcourt firſt entered, fearing he ſhould loſe the means of becoming ſuddenly rich.

With cautious and trembling ſteps, De Valcourt firſt advanced, and kneeling, preſſed the hand of Lady Mountſhannon to his lips, when looking earneſtly at him, and ſtarting

ſtarting back with a faint ſcream, ſhe uttered his name; while a gleam of returning joy animated her countenance.

Perfectly aſſured by this, that her powers of memory were not impaired, he communicated, by degrees, the happineſs that awaited her; introduced Mountford, whoſe appearance gave an additional glow to her countenance; though her long familiarity with miſery, and the weakneſs of her frame, rendered her incapable of realizing the preſent change; it ſeemed to her rather like a pleaſing viſion that would ſoon vaniſh, than a ſubſtantial good ſhe was about to enjoy.

Anxious to remove her from this dark abode, they led her to the coach, and as it gently moved along, the freſh air, to which ſhe had been ſo long a ſtranger, in ſome degree relieved the languor that oppreſſed her; and before ſhe reached the inn, the animating effects of liberty had rendered her more capable of enjoying her altered ſtate.

We

We muſt now return to Matilda, on whom adventures crouded, and whoſe preſent rapture fully compenſated for the preceding months of bitterneſs and diſtreſs. Eager to watch the arrival of her mother, ſhe quitted Jannette's chamber, for a room which commanded a more diſtant view of the road, where that amiable girl, anxious to behold a meeting ſo tender, ſoon followed. But they had not waited long in ſilent expectation, before Sir Charles Ormond, who had juſt arrived, ruſhed into the apartment, and ſeizing the hand of Matilda, called her a glorious creature—the ornament of her ſex; thanked her for her goodneſs, while he enquired with much ſolicitude, for Jannette, his tender, intereſting Jannette. His raptures and enquiries, were, however, ſoon at an end, when on turning his eyes, he beheld the hapleſs, trembling girl, overpowered with contending emotion, fixed to her ſeat, without the power to ſpeak or move. The ſcene was affecting: Jannette wept; Sir Charles paced the room with frantic geſ-

tures;

tures; while Matilda preſented his infant boy, and ſaw with delight, parental love ſparkle in his eyes, as he preſſed it to his boſom.

When his emotion had a little ſubſided, he ſaid, "I have again to entreat your pardon, dear Matilda, for the uneaſineſs I have cauſed you, and the injury I have involuntarily done De Valcourt; but as my fault has now been without deſign, I ſhall need only an explanation, to ſecure your forgiveneſs. The ſtory is ſhort: when I parted with De Valcourt in France, as I wiſhed my father to remain ignorant of my being in that kingdom; — thinking it would more effectually ſcreen me from his knowledge, I aſſumed the name and title of my friend. In vain, as I journeyed, I applied to diſſipation to divert my melancholy, it only increaſed the anguiſh of my mind; and, determined to try the effects of ſolitude, and a total change of ſcene, I went to the village of ———, where the kind efforts of my dear girl, preſſing the hand of

Jan-

Jannette, ſoon reſtored my peace, ſoon awakened a new affection in my boſom, or rather changed the object of my regard. You know the ſtory of our loves, and I have only to aſſure you, I am guiltleſs of intentional injury; my paſſion was foſtered by circumſtances; the ſolitude in which I lived, the frame of my mind, her innocent tenderneſs, all conſpiring, with opportunity, I prevailed with her to form the union, of which you have beheld the fruits.

"We had paſſed but a ſhort time in this fond interchange of mutual affection, when the letters of my faithful John arrived; ſhocked at the intelligence they contained, and determined to render you all the aſſiſtance in my power, yet fearing to create jealouſy or ſuſpicion in the boſom of her who ſeemed to live but for my happineſs, I quitted her, under pretence of a ſummons from my father, and travelled half over France, vainly ſeeking you at every convent, for in one of them I judged it probable you

you might be placed: till almoſt deſpairing of ſucceſs, I was about to return for Jannette, who had promiſed to accompany me to England, when I accidentally met with your friend, Lady Charlotte, from whom I learned your eſcape. I then diſpatched another letter to John, deſiring him to watch diligently the arrival of every veſſel; while I haſtened forward to the cottage, where I heard with horror, that Jannette had eloped with an Engliſh ſailor.

Half frantic with grief and apprehenſion, I curſed the caution that had prevented our correſpondence; the ſecreſy I had preſerved, that would now ſeparate us for ever: accuſed the old man of falſehood, whom I ſuſpected of having diſcovered our connection, and ſecreting his daughter from me; when in the midſt of this confuſion, your letter arrived; which having read, my Jannette's father, with a diſdainful air, as if ſcorning my ſuſpicions, preſented to me. I immediately knew the characters, and every circumſtance cor-

correſponding, my fears vaniſhed; but my ſecret was betrayed; in the height of my rage I had forgotten all caution, and it was with much difficulty I could appeaſe the indignation of the honeſt old man. At length, after promiſing every reparation in my power, I calmed both his diſtreſs and anger; and without waiting for further ceremony, purſued my journey with all the haſte I could.

On my road I met the faithful Duncan, who from the moment he left Mountford Caſtle, had been ſeeking his maſter; but as two perſons were travelling under the ſame name, he had been firſt directed after the true, and then the falſe De Valcourt, till he had nearly loſt us both."

Sir Charles was now ſilent, when Matilda cried, "But this book, this fatal book! which has led to all theſe diſcoveries; how came you by this?"

"Oh,"

"Oh," returned he, taking it in his hand, "this I took from De Valcourt, the morning I called to take leave of him, it laid on the table, when he quitting the room on ſome buſineſs, I took it up, and pleaſed with finding your ſentiments written in the margin, I could not reſiſt the temptation of putting it in my pocket, thinking I ſhould do him no great injury, who was conſtantly receiving freſh proofs of your affection, and enlarged communication of your ideas."

The coach now drove up, when Matilda was with difficulty reſtrained from inſtantly throwing herſelf at her mother's feet, but the dread of alarming her, checked her deſires, and ſhe waited till Mountford led her to this much wiſhed for interview. Tender and affecting indeed it was; but ſo varied were their emotions, ſo rapidly did they ſucceed each other—ſo often was joy clouded by ſorrow—and ſorrow ſuſpended by joy—as they were alternately folded in each others embrace,

embrace, that deſcription would fail to give an adequate idea of the ſcene.

The delight of Matilda was repreſſed by the alteration ſhe ſaw in this amiable parent; and the rapture of Lady Mountſhannon, by reflections on the paſt, and fears of the future, which in her preſent weak ſtate of health, ſhe was not wholly able to repreſs.

After ſome time ſpent in explanations, the whole party ſat down to a cheerful meal. Happineſs was univerſally felt; joy ſo ſudden and unexpected, operated with electrical force on their animal ſpirits; the day paſſed in the moſt delightful interchange of congenial ſentiments and mutual affection; and it was a late hour when they parted for the purpoſes of repoſe; if ſpirits ſo reſtleſs, ſo animated with delight as theirs, could reſt.

Early next morning Matilda went to the apartment of Jannette, who, having ſpent the

the night in reflections, had loſt ſome of thoſe exhilirating hopes which had filled her mind the evening before. As Matilda entered, a ſigh eſcaped her, and a tear, ſhe vainly endeavoured to reſtrain, ſtole down her cheek; when, taking her hand, ſhe attempted to ſoothe the ſadneſs of her heart, by the endearments of friendſhip; and, having a little calmed her ſpirits, ſhe enquired into her future plans of conduct; but to this Jannette was unable to reply—ſhe heſitated, ſighed, and wept: when Matilda, after preparing her for the converſation, ſaid, "Though Sir Charles is cleared from the load of guilt with which, as De Valcourt, he was charged, you have yet too much reaſon to fear his connection with you has been formed merely to gratify a ſenſual deſire; and can you conſent to live with him on thoſe terms; to be the convenient toy of his idle hours; to act the wanton when his paſſion palls; to paſs the remainder of your life degraded, an outcaſt from ſociety?"

"Ah, no, no," cried Jannette with energy, "I could be content to forfeit the world's eſteem for love and him; but the picture you have drawn agonizes my heart: Shield me, my friend, from ſuch a fate."

"Then you muſt exert all your fortitude, and reſolve never to ſee him more," returned Matilda.

Jannette pauſed; ſhe gazed on her infant, and wept: then, promiſing to be guided by her counſels, Matilda left her, to go and acquaint Sir Charles with her reſolution.

Fully bent on her purpoſe, ſhe ſoon found the Baronet, who, as he liſtened to her diſcourſe, bit his lips, clenched his hands, and traverſed the room in paſſionate diſorder, ſwearing he could never marry the daughter of a peaſant; while Matilda dwelt on the mental endowments of Jannette; the amiable ſimplicity of her heart; the ſtrength of her affection: contraſting the happineſs of ſuch an union with the cold, formal, ceremonial

inſipidity

insipidity of a fashionable alliance; till the ardour of his affection aiding the force of her reasons, which he could not but acknowledge to be true, he promised to bind himself to her by an indissoluble union, if she would consent to keep it secret during the life of his father, and bear patiently the odium which might attach to her character as his mistress. To this Matilda, in the name of her friend consented, as she led him to her apartment, to receive the confirmation from her own lips; when, pleased with the happiness she had created, she left them to enjoy the fond endearments of affection, and make new vows of eternal constancy.

The following morning the whole party set forward to London, where they arrived without accident, and were received by Lord Mountshannon with so much kindness, and such deep humility for his past injustice, as greatly affected every one present.

Lady Mountſhannon was immediately reſtored to the guardianſhip of her children; and Matilda, ſoon as the law's delay would allow, not only united to De Valcourt, but put in poſſeſſion of her fortune, which, though conſiderably reduced by the demands of her father, was yet more than ſufficient, with prudence, to gratify all their deſires.

Sir Charles now inſiſted on reſtoring to De Valcourt his eſtate, which he as obſtinately refuſed to accept, and the diſpute was at length ſettled by Beaumont's declaring as he had no near relatives, he ſhould make De Valcourt his heir, and had already ſettled on him a ſmall eſtate which would render the reſtitution unneceſſary. "But," continued he, if I have any influence, I would perſuade you to ſettle this conteſted property on the Baronet's intended bride Jannette, to which I will make ſome conſiderable addition, if ſhe will allow me to be father on the occaſion."

This

This was readily agreed to, and Beaumont, De Valcourt, and Matilda ſoon after witneſſed the private ceremony which gave her a legal claim to his protection.

As Mountford caſtle had been the ſcene of his earlieſt love, De Valcourt built a ſmall, but convenient houſe in its neighbourhood, to which he ſoon conveyed his unambitious bride. But, as neither Matilda nor himſelf could find enjoyment in ſelfiſh purſuits, or indolent habits of indulgence, they conſtantly ſpent their mornings in purſuing, ſeparately, ſome uſeful employment or improving ſtudy; while the communication of their progreſs in knowledge or utility furniſhed their evenings with rational delight, and prevented that yawning indifference, and ſtupid inſipidity which too often, in the married life, ſucceeds to the firſt months of rapture.

Matilda, to whom the knowledge of nature had ever been intereſting, applied her-

ſelf to botanical enquiries; ſhe likewiſe, while cultivating her little farm, made ſome improvements in agriculture, which were ſoon univerſally adopted round the country, and proved highly beneficial.

De Valcourt, who had once felt the hand of power, and whoſe only wiſh now was to ameliorate the condition of man, ſet himſelf cloſely to examine every government that had ever exiſted from the earlieſt periods of time, that, by diſcriminating between what was good or bad in each, he might form a perfect theory, where neither public nor domeſtic tyranny ſhould exiſt; from which, he hoped ſome future patriot might derive uſeful information; and though his friends would ſometimes laugh at theſe viſionary labours, he was not to be diverted from his purpoſe.

Lady Mountſhannon, though ſhe ſpent much of her time with her children, inhabited

bited the ancient caſtle, in a ſolitary corner of which, his Lordſhip, whoſe religion conſiſted chiefly in ſuperſtition, ſhut himſelf up, as a kind of penance for his paſt crimes, which he wholly forſook, rather from the dread of eternal puniſhment, and his inability to purſue them, (as his health was never entirely reſtored) than from a love of virtue.

Though Matilda, who frequently viſited him, conſtantly endeavoured to inſpire him with a reliſh for purer delights, while ſhe ſoothed his mind, by aſſuring him that had ſhe never ſuffered, ſhe could never have felt her preſent happineſs ſo ſtrongly, or, perhaps, have been ſo deſerving of it.

To his wife he entirely committed the management of his eſtate, who, by her prudent care, paid off his debts with little or no injury to Mountford, who, in a few years became its profeſſor.

The

The friendſhip of Matilda and Jannette continued to increaſe with their years; while the countenance and protection of the former ſheltered the latter from cenſure or reproach for a long ſeries of years, while her marriage remained a ſecret; and her mind, under ſuch a tutoreſs, attained a degree of ſtrength beyond even her own moſt ſanguine expectations.

Sir Charles, too, her beloved huſband, remembered with rapture, the hour that made them one; for the little reſtraint he was obliged for a long time to practice, kept paſſion alive, till friendſhip and eſteem ſucceeding, bound him to her in a firmer union.

Lady Charlotte Howard, Matilda's convent friend, was among the firſt of her viſitors, where meeting with Mountford, a mutual attachment ſoon ſucceeded, when the ties of conſanguinity were added to, though they could not increaſe thoſe of friendſhip.

Mary

Mary and her husband were settled in a larger farm, near their former habitation; and to the faithful old Duncan, a comfortable independence was secured.

Lord Ormond, though at first greatly incensed against his son, for neglecting so fair an opportunity of inriching himself by marrying Matilda, restored him at length to his favour; and as he was not very solicitous about his moral conduct, and as Jannette lived secluded from the world, he never enquired into the nature of the Baronet's connection with her.

Mandeville, though disappointed of his revenge by Matilda's marrying another, was yet consoled by the thought that Sir Charles was not the object she preferred to him; and he soon found means to dissipate his chagrine, and soothe the mortification his wounded pride had received.

De Valcourt and Matilda continued to live in retirement, dispensing happiness to all around; while by active exertions they secured their own lasting felicity.

FINIS.

4 DE 58

T. Plummer, Printer, Seething-Lane, Tower-Street.